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MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

MAY, 1969

VOL. 24, NO. 6

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The GIRL With THE FRIGHTENED EYES

by BRETT HALLIDAY

In a murdered man's room Mike Shayne found it, the picture that could send a fool to the gas chamber—and an innocent girl to hell. There was one last chance to save her—if he could stay alive long enough to see it through!

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The New MIKE SHAYNE Short Novel



The GIRL With THE TORTURED EYES

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Death was her lover, the girl with the fearsome secret. A jealous, proud lover he, was, too. And one man alone could break his spell. Mike Shayne—that is, if he lived long enough . . .



MICHAEL SHAYNE sighed behind his desk when his intercom buzzed that evening. He looked at his watch.

It was ten minutes to five, and he had a date with a bottle of the best cognac and a two-inch steak. But he leaned forward and flicked the switch.

"Yes, Angel?" Shayne said wearily.

"A Mr. Burrows to see you, Michael."

Before Shayne could answer and ask what Mr. Burrows wanted to see him about, he heard a deep voice rumbling out in his secretary, Lucy Hamilton's, office, and some sounds of confusion.

Lucy's voice came back, a little clipped and annoyed. "I'm sorry, Michael. It seems I should have

said Dr. Burrows. Anyway, he wants to talk to you urgently."

Shayne sighed again. It was always urgent. "Okay, Angel. Trot him in."

The door opened firmly, and a man strode in with a look on his face that implied he did not like to be told to "trot" anywhere. Shayne returned the look with equal arrogance.

The man's cool blue eyes had a piercing, almost fanatic power. He did not back down from Shayne's gaze, but he did seem to realize that he was not in a position to insist on his rights.

"I have a job for you to do, Mr. Shayne," Burrows said.

His voice was crisp and sharp. Shayne rubbed at his gaunt jaw and studied Dr. Burrows. The man did not look, or act, much like a doctor of anything but medicine, and somehow Shayne didn't think that Burrows was a medical doctor.

Burrows was average height and heavy, very heavy. Not fat. More like a wrestler, all shoulders, arms, thick waist, and powerful calves that bulged under his immaculate gray palm beach suit. All muscle, and walking on the balls of his feet, lightly and without effort. Yet Burrows wasn't young—gray hair going white; a big face deeply wrinkled by wind and sun.

"A job is always good," Shayne said laconically.

Burrows sat down. "Do you know who I am?"

"Should I? I mean, maybe I don't get around enough."

Burrows's lip curled faintly. "No, I imagine you wouldn't get around much in the world that knows my work. I am Dr. Ed Burrows. I think I can say my name and work is world renowned."

Shayne arched a ragged red eyebrow. There was a faint ring to the name—Ed Burrows. Not Edward or Edgar or Edmund, but *Ed*. Dr. Ed. There was a popular feel to it: dignified and yet a man of the people. Some kind of popular lecturer, or—

"I've got it," Shayne said. "Sorry. You don't look like you should, you know. What's the doctor? Divinity?"

"Naturally. My *alma mater* saw fit to honor my work for soul-peace."

Shayne did not ask what Dr. Burrows's *alma mater* was. He didn't think the famous soul saver would welcome the question. Because he remembered Dr. Ed Burrows now. A minor-league Billy Graham, careful to claim no denomination of religion. In fact no religion at all—soul peace. Ed Burrows, the fiery man of vision, who wrestled with evil in front of thousands in football stadiums—at a fair price per head, or soul.

"Okay. What's your job?" Shayne said instead.

"A simple matter. An errand. I

wish you to deliver a package to a specific location tonight at ten o'clock. I'll pay your usual fee for a day's work. I have the package here."

Burrows patted an attache case he was carrying. He placed it on Shayne's desk. The redhead made no move to pick it up. His gray eyes contemplated it casually.

"What's in the package, Doc?" he asked.

"That is no concern of yours. I am merely hiring you to deliver it—at a high rate of pay, I'd say. You're to go to the Hotel Packwood at exactly ten o'clock, room forty-seven, and give the package to a man named Elbert Jones. He will give you a package in return. That you bring to me at my home. Is that clear?"

"Clear as a bell. Blackmail," Shayne said bluntly. "What's the blackmailer got on you, Doc?"

"If anyone has anything on me, Shayne, I'm not about to make it worse by telling you!"

"Don't you trust me, Doc?"

"Not for a minute where my reputation is concerned," Burrows snapped. The muscular evangelist looked at his watch. It had more diamonds than numbers. "Now I have work to do. Tell me your fee, and I'll pay it. You have the package and the instructions."

"No," Shayne said.

Burrows had his check book already out, was standing to rest it on Shayne's desk as he wrote. He

blinked at Shayne, his mouth open, puzzled.

"What?"

"No. I don't want the job," Shayne said.

"But I'm hiring you! You have to take it!"

"No I don't, and you're not hiring me. I don't take errands in the dark, and I don't deliver anything I don't know what it is. In fact, Dr. Burrows, I don't run errands, period."

"But—" Burrows sputtered.

"Get another errand boy," Doc.

"You have no right to refuse me! You hear?"

"Good-by, Doc."

Burrows stood there and his big face turned a slow purple. He clenched his massive fists in a very unevangelical way. He took two quick steps toward Shayne. The redhead didn't move from his chair.

"Don't, Burrows. I'll throw you out on your face."

Burrows seemed to be strangling in his rage. Shayne decided that the evangelist was more wrestler than soul saver in a lot of ways. Burrows held his menacing position for another few long seconds. Then he shuddered and regained control. His massive body seemed to breathe more slowly.

"I'll remember you, Shayne. Count on it."

Shayne said nothing. Burrows turned on his heel and strode out, carrying the attache case. Shayne

watched him go, and turned in his chair to look out at the sun for a time. Lucy Hamilton came into the office.

"You turned him down, Michael?"

"That I did, Angel. He wanted a pigeon, not a detective."

Lucy went back out. Shayne sat there for a little longer. Then he grinned, clapped his panama on his shock of red hair, and went out for his steak and cognac.

II

THE POUNDING ON the door of his apartment-hotel suite woke Mike Shayne from a fine dream of a world of good cognac and better steaks. He looked groggily at his bedside clock. Two o'clock!

The pounding continued. Shayne groped out of bed and into his robe.

"Hold it! I'm coming."

The pounding stopped. Shayne got his robe on—swearing—and opened the door. His eyebrows went up in surprise.

"Can I come in, Mike?"

Will Gentry, Chief of Police of Miami, stood there alone. The bluff chief chewed on his perennial black cigar, unlit. His face was grim and unhappy. Shayne stepped back to let his old friend in. Something was very wrong. Will Gentry did not make personal calls, even on old friends, at two in the morning these days.

"What is it, Will? Something important?" Shayne asked.

"Where have you been all night, Mike?" Gentry said as he came in and closed the door behind him.

The Chief stood in the center of the room, turned to face Shayne and the door, the cigar cold in his grim face. Shayne watched his old friend.

"Alone," Shayne said. "I ate out, at Mario's Place."

"We can check that."

"Then I came home, watched television—an old movie—and went to bed. I was tired."

"Tonight you had to be tired?"

Shayne nodded. "What is it, Will? It must be bad or they wouldn't have called you."

Gentry nodded. The gruff Chief sat down, groped for a match. Shayne found one and lighted Gentry's cigar. The Chief puffed for a few moments.

"I came over myself, alone," Gentry said at last. "No alibi for your time at all?"

"No, except that Pete on the desk knows when I came in. But there's a side way out. You know that."

"I know that," Gentry agreed. "Do you know Rex Calin?"

"You know I do, Will. So do you. About as low a snake as ever conned a woman or robbed a man. We both sent him up once. Right?"

"Yeah, only I've got an alibi," Gentry said. "He's dead, Mike. Shot three times about three hours

ago. Close range. Small caliber pistol."

"Damn it, Will, Rex Calin had more enemies than teeth. He's been mixed up in every dirty crime on the books. I know people who'd have killed Rex just for looking at them."

"Yeah, except Rex has been out of town for a couple of years. He's been operating up in Palm Beach. He hasn't stepped on a toe here in years. We didn't even know he was back, and evidence says no one else did. He only got into town yesterday."

"All right," Shayne said. "Why me, Will? If it was anyone else talking to me I'd have asked for a warrant long ago."

"Easy, Mike, it is me," Gentry said. "I know you didn't kill him, but I can't run a city police department on my own say-so. You've got to help me."

"Tell me what you've got?"

"He had a room at the Hotel Packwood. About eleven o'clock the guy in the next room heard the shots. Naturally, he froze up, but then he heard the door close and he peeked out. Says that was maybe fifteen minutes later. He saw a big, gaunt man in a gray suit hurry down the corridor. He says the man was maybe red-headed."

Gentry stopped and watched Shayne over his cigar. The red-head wasn't thinking about Gentry for the moment. He was



thinking about Dr. Ed Burrows and the Hotel Packwood.

"Miami's full of big redheads in gray suits," Shayne said.

"Yeah," Gentry said. "We got there about eleven forty-five. The guy next door finally got the nerve to look in, saw Rex, and called us through the switchboard. We've checked the guy. He's clean. So Lieutenant Bowers arrived with the team. They didn't find much. But they did find this."

Gentry held out a card. Shayne looked at it without touching it. It was one of his own cards, with his name, and on the back was written: *Hotel Packwood, room 47*

"Room forty-seven was Calin's room?" Shayne asked.

"Yes. Where'd it come from, Mike? I know you don't hand your cards out to just anyone, and Calin just got into town."

"Is it all you've got?"

"It's enough to take you and show you to the witness. Unless you can explain it. You're a known enemy of Calin's."

"Let's go see the witness. Is he downtown?"

"No, he's still at the Packwood. I'm bending a few rules, Mike, but it cuts both ways. I can't just dismiss it all because you're a friend."

"Okay. Let's go to the Packwood."

Shayne dressed quickly while Gentry waited. The Chief smoked nervously. Shayne started to put on his holster, then looked at Gentry. The Chief shook his head.

Shayne left his gun behind when they left.

III

THE HOTEL PACKWOOD was a solid, middle-class hotel in an older section of the city that had once been a first-class section. It was still a quiet area of brick apartments and small stores.

Police cars were in front of the Packwood's shabby marqu e. Gentry hustled Shayne up from the deserted street. It was not an area where there were many curious to gather at two-thirty on a weekday morning.

The door to room 47 was open. A complete police team labored inside. The medical examiner worked over Rex Calin, who lay

sprawled near the dispirited bed. Not a shabby bed, or room, but lifeless, with the tired memory of middle-class affluence forty years ago.

Shayne looked around while Gentry went to talk to his men. Calin had not been in the room long. There was a single suitcase, elegant leather with silver mountings, still unpacked on a luggage rack at the foot of the bed. The closets held one suit, one extra pair of shoes. The bathroom had been used perhaps once—to shave and brush teeth, the equipment not in the cabinet but on the sink and tank top, the way a man will do when he does not expect to stay in a room long.

It had all the aura of a man in passage, like a bird of prey ready to make one kill and fly away fast. Calin had not bothered to settle in; he had not been hanging around.

Gentry came back with three plainclothes men. Two of them were vaguely Shayne's size, and one had reddish hair. That was Lieutenant Bowers.

"Hello, Mike. Bad play," Bowers said.

"Bad enough," Shayne said. "Shouldn't we have a few more a little closer to me, Will?"

"The witness never saw the face, and he isn't going to see yours, Mike. I've got one guy coming up whose sort of a dead-ringer from the back. We just have

to see if he thinks it could have been you. There'll be a real line-up downtown later."

"Okay," Shayne agreed. "Read me my rights before you forget, Will."

Bowers read Shayne his rights to silence and counsel. Everyone was embarrassed. The stranger who looked like Mike Shayne from the rear arrived. Gentry stood them all in a line, backs to the door, and got the witness.

Shayne heard a nervous whispering and shuffling at the door as the witness came in. Then Gentry's voice:

"All right. Look at those men. Is one of them the man you saw leaving this room?"

Shayne sensed the witness staring hard. He could almost feel the eyes boring into his back.

"Well, like I said, I only got a quick look. That—those two there. Only the one's too dark. He looked a lot like that guy third from the left. It could of been him."

Shayne was third from the witness's left. He waited. Gentry said quietly: "Okay. Don't go away. We'll need you downtown. And if you can remember anything else call us fast."

"Sure," the witness said. "I mean, I never really saw the guy, you know. I mean, he just looks like that fellow. I ain't sayin' it is him."

"We know," Gentry said.

Shayne turned now and saw the witness—a small, sallow man with a nervous face that twitched. The man saw Shayne looking at him, paled, and scuttled from the room. When the witness was gone, Shayne looked at Gentry.

"Okay, Will, now what?"

"First tell me how Rex Calin got your card."

"I'll do better. I'll show you. Let's go."

Gentry followed Shayne out and back down to the street. In the Chief's car, Shayne directed them to the address Dr. Ed Burrows had given. It was a large, impressive brick house set in well-tended grounds in an area that had once been elegant, but that was now slowly changing for the worse.

On the big brick house was a large sign, in neon, proclaiming to the world that this was: *World Headquarters Soul-Peace Brotherhood*, DR. ED BURROWS. The main door, a double door, was open, and a welcome glow of light radiated out into the night even at this hour.

As Shayne and Gentry reached the door they saw a smaller sign, also in neon: *Enter All and Find Peace. We Are Never Closed To Love*. They entered, not looking for peace.

"What is all this, Mike?" Gentry said.

"Ed Burrows tried to hire me to take a package to room forty-

seven in the Hotel Packwood. I turned him down."

Before Gentry could comment, a wraithlike shape seemed to materialize from nowhere inside the chapel-like building. A short man dressed in a conservative business suit.

"You are seeking soul peace, gentlemen?" the wraith said. "We are not active at this hour, but we are open for your meditation. Feel free to rest here."

"We want to see Burrows," Shayne snapped.

The wraith looked slowly at Shayne. "Dr. Ed is asleep, sir. We all need rest. Perhaps in the morning—"

"Now," Chief Gentry said. He displayed his credentials.

"Police?" the wraith said. "Well, I'm sorry, but—"

Gentry said, "Look closer. I'm Chief of Police. I have some important business with Burrows. Now, get him. We'll wait."

"Chief?" the wraith said. "I can't get him now, Chief, but he lives at the rear. If you go back and ring he'll be there."

Shayne and Gentry went out and around to the rear. Half the big house, the hidden rear half, was a residence—with a private garden, lawn, swimming pool and tennis court.

"He lives pretty well," Shayne commented.

Gentry rang, long and loud. A furious old woman in a dressing

gown finally answered. Gentry handled her like the pro he was. Her fury changed to alarm, and she hurried off to get Dr. Ed Burrows.

They waited in a kind of reception study until Burrows came down. The evangelist with the wrestler's build did not hide his annoyance at having been routed out of bed.

"What the devil can I do for you at this hour, Chief Gentry?" Burrows said, and his eyes glanced over Shayne.

"How long have you been in bed, Burrows?" Shayne snapped.

Burrows turned his big, face toward Shayne. His massive body seemed to expand with surprise. "Why, since about eleven, officer. Then this is more than a public social call?"

"A lot more," Gentry said, and then the Miami Police Chief's eyes grew small. He glanced at Shayne. "Don't you know Shayne, Burrows?"

Shayne was staring at the muscular and massive evangelist who had blandly called him 'officer'. Burrows acted bewildered.

"Know him? Why, no I don't. Isn't he one of your men, Chief Gentry?" the evangelist said.

Shayne stepped close to the heavy man. "Knock it off, Burrows! Rex Calin is dead! He was blackmailing you, and now he's dead! Who took the package to him, or did you go yourself?"

Burrows blinked. "Who is Rex Calin?"

The evangelist turned to Gentry. "What is this man talking about, Chief? Do you know? I demand an explanation!"

In the silence of the study, Shayne stared at Burrows, and Gentry turned to stare at Shayne with a growing fear on his bluff face.

IV

MIKE SHAYNE snapped, "You're denying that you know me, Burrows? You're trying to say that you didn't come to me this evening to hire me to take a package to room forty-seven of the Hotel Packwood?"

Burrows shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr.—Shayne. Was that it?"

"You know damn well what my name is!" Shayne cried.

"Until this moment I never heard your name," Burrows said. "I did not hire you, or try to hire you, to do anything. I never heard of any Rex Calin, or the Hotel Packwood. As for blackmail, who would blackmail me? What for?"

"I don't know that. You wouldn't tell me. But you took one of my cards and left it with Calin. I thought it might have had some simple explanation. Now I'm thinking you planned it all!"

"And I'm thinking that you're in trouble, Mr. Shayne," Burrows said, suddenly angry. "I don't



know what this man is up to, Chief, but it looks like some kind of cover-up to me!"

Shayne stepped closer to Burrows. The massive evangelist did not budge an inch. Shayne's gray eyes were filled with fury.

"Did you drop the card when you killed him, and need to hide it all, Burrows," Shayne said curtly, "or was it all a frame? Did you kill him and try to get me blamed?"

Burrows whirled to Gentry. "Get him out of here, Gentry! You hear me? I'm not without power and influence. If you have anything at all to substantiate his crazy story, then show it to a judge and get a warrant. Otherwise get him out of here!"

Gentry stepped between the two men. The bluff Chief pushed Shayne back. His grim face studied Burrows.

"You're denying that you ever met Shayne here, that you ever tried to hire him, that you knew Rex Calin, or that you were being blackmailed?" Gentry said quietly.

"I deny all of it! I never saw this man."

"You had no reason to have a package delivered to Rex Calin, never contacted him at the Hotel Packwood?"

"No. I told you I never heard of Rex Calin. Damn it, Chief, how or why would anyone blackmail me? I think you better have this guy's head examined! I get nuts like him all the time in my position."

Shayne said nothing. His gray eyes had calmed while Gentry had been talking to Burrows. Now he quietly lit a cigarette and looked around the evangelist's study. It was filled with books, framed photographs of the great men Burrows had known and knew, and various framed diplomas.

"All right," Gentry said. "I don't know what's going on, but I'll find out. Meanwhile, Dr. Burrows, I think you better keep yourself available for us."

"Don't intimidate me, Chief. I have speaking engagements, work to do. Unless you have some charge, I'll be going about my normal business."

"That's all right, but you make it a point to stay where we know you are. I'd hate to have to search for you."

"Very well, my life is an open book. You can always find me through this organization. On my part, I intend to watch and see what you do with this nut. I'd hate to have to tell the newspapers such men are running around loose

making wild charges with your approval."

"I'll tend to my business," Gentry said dryly. "Come on, Mike."

They left. In the Chief's car again, Mike Shayne smoked and looked at Gentry.

"Well, Will, who do you believe?" Shayne said.

"You know who I believe," Gentry growled. "That's not the problem. I believe you, and Burrows is playing some kind of game. But the public and the commissioner aren't going to like it at all. We have nothing to connect Burrows to Calin or to you yet, and we've got you connected to Calin."

Shayne nodded. "Okay. How do you want to handle it? I need time to find out what's going on."

Gentry started the car and drove off. For a few miles he was silent while Shayne waited. The whole night of the great city seemed to breathe in a slow and ponderous movement. Gentry finally let out a big sigh.

"I'll take you in, Mike. We'll book you on manslaughter, and get a quick arraignment. That'll satisfy everyone up top, and look okay to the public if it gets out. Then you can post bail. That way it's all legal. I'll have to suspend your license, too. But you'll be out on the street."

"Okay, Will. Let's get at it."

At Headquarters Gentry rushed it all through with every power he had. By nine o'clock the judge was

listening as they did the arraignment. Shayne was bound over for trial, and bail set—low because the D.A.'s man had the word from Gentry. The judge was a bit suspicious, but he went along because of Shayne's record. Shayne did not think anyone was really fooling the judge—the judge could smell something cooking, but he let it go since all was legal.

By ten o'clock Shayne was on the street in front of the court. He drove to his office to explain it all to Lucy Hamilton, who didn't like it.

"That terrible man! Manslaughter, Michael! Why that's awful!" she exclaimed.

"I'll find out what's up, Angel, believe me," Shayne growled.

He called Tim Rourke to explain before the reporter got worried when he heard the story. So far Rourke hadn't heard, which showed how tight Gentry had kept the wraps on. Shayne explained it to Rourke, and Tim promised to dig deep into the history of Dr. Ed Burrows.

Shayne hung up and thought for a time. He was going to have to start from scratch: he didn't know if Calin had been blackmailing Burrows, and if so why, or if there was some entirely different explanation. He clapped on his panama and headed out for his car. He was tired from lack of sleep, but not so tired that his anger wasn't going full blast.

Lucy Hamilton looked up as he passed. "Michael?"

"Yeah?"

"What happens if you don't find out what's up? If you can't prove who did kill Calin?"

Shayne stopped and looked at her. "That's a good question, Angel. Let's not worry about it."

But as he went on out Shayne's face was set.

V

IN THE LATE morning sun the Hotel Packwood looked even more dreary. Not exactly shabby, but pathetic, like a once fine young man with somewhat stodgy ideas, now an old man with the same ideas that time had passed by.

Mike Shayne slipped across the lobby unseen and up the fire stairs. He was operating now without a license, and he didn't want to do any more than he had to that might embarrass Gentry.

In the corridor of room 47 he checked carefully. There were no police, and no one else in the corridor. The door of room 47 had a police seal on it. There were some risks he had to take. He broke the seal and used his ring of keys on the door.

Inside he closed the door, leaned on it, and studied the room. Nothing had changed from last night except that Rex Calin's body was gone, its position marked in chalk on the seedy rug. There was

little point in searching the obvious places—Gentry's men wouldn't have missed anything.

What Shayne needed was some signs so faint they would have been seen but overlooked, or something overlooked because the police did not know about Dr. Ed Burrows. Or something hidden by a blackmailer, if Calin had been trying blackmail.

An hour later he had drawn a total blank on the first two possibilities. There was nothing in the room overlooked by the police, or nothing they had missed that he could find. He turned over rugs, poked into crevices in the floor, moved everything that could be moved.

Nothing anywhere in the room indicated that anyone had ever been in the room except Rex Calin himself.

Shayne lit a cigarette and began to think about a man who had been out of town a long time, and who had come back to blackmail. Judging from what he had known of Rex Calin, the dead man had been a lifelong crook on a relatively low level. Would such a man have been likely to know Dr. Ed Burrows?

The answer was obviously no. And Calin had been in town only a few days. Which meant that whatever he had to use for blackmail he had brought with him. It hadn't been found on him.

So, he had brought blackmail

material to town, probably from Palm Beach, where Gentry said he had been operating. He had made his contact with Ed Burrows. Burrows had been ready to pay, or so it seemed. But all blackmailers, especially experienced crooks like Rex Calin, knew the risk of the payoff.

The hold on the victim had to be in force until the money was safely paid and the blackmailer safely away. Otherwise there was the risk that the victim would send a bully boy in the hope of strong-arming the blackmailer at the moment of payoff in an attempt to get both evidence and the money back.

The evidence would be hidden, but usually somewhere where the blackmailer could get his hands on it quickly. Blackmailers liked to have their advantage at hand in case they had to make a quick run. Victims were unpredictable.

Had Burrows gotten the evidence and the money? Shayne didn't think so.

If Burrows had found the hold Calin had had on him and made a clean getaway, he would not have tried to implicate Shayne—who was the only person who knew Burrows had had an interest in room 47!

No, Burrows was trying to squeeze him, Shayne, for some reason. Maybe to help Burrows get the information Calin had had. Shayne gets the evidence, then



Burrows exonerates him. Unless Burrows had killed Calin.

Even then, Shayne didn't think Burrows had the blackmail material—and that meant it had to be somewhere close at hand.

The gaunt redhead finished his cigarette and sat down. He let his gray eyes go over the whole room, looked at every nook, every cranny, every possible hiding place that the police could have missed, and that a killer in a hurry would miss.

He had already looked under the rugs, turned over the furniture.

The police would not have forgotten the closets or the cabinets. Shayne had looked at the backs of everything.

Since the evidence had not been found, it could not be very large. One paper, maybe. Or a letter. Or a photograph.

He got up and went into the bathroom. He opened the top of the toilet tank. It was a favorite hiding place—but not for Rex Calin. The tank was empty.

Shayne returned to the main room. He looked up at the light fixture. No shadow showed through the glass.

He went to each window and looked out. There was nothing hanging outside.

Shayne went back to the chair and sat down again. Once more he let his glance study the whole room. This time his eyes gazed at the open suitcase for a long time. A man who might have to leave in a hurry would find it an advantage to have his important material already in the suitcase—but that was one of the first places anyone would search.

Shayne got up and went to the suitcase. It had been searched, even the lining slit, and there were no secret compartments or a false bottom. The few clothes in it had nothing hidden in them, not even the two flat shirts.

Then Mike Shayne noticed the leather label tag.

An ordinary cheap leatherette tag attached to the handle, with a plain white card inside it with Rex Calin's name and address typed on it and a thin layer of plastic over it.

Except that it was larger than most Shayne had seen, maybe four inches long by three inches wide, and the address typed on it was *Hotel Packwood*.

But Rex Calin had only just arrived at the Packwood, and would probably have never come back if

he had left. So why type out a label with the hotel as his address?

Men like Rex Calin didn't usually go around labelling their baggage.

Shayne removed the label, opened it, and slipped out the tag. It was stiff, not a card at all. He turned it over.

It was a photograph. A very interesting photograph of a man and a woman in what looked like a motel bedroom. The woman was in a short nightgown, and was little more than a girl. The man was much older, maybe forty-five, in his shirt-sleeves and suit trousers. A big man with dark hair. He was holding the girl's hand, and there was a tender expression to his sad eyes. He had very sad eyes.

Behind the couple was the bed, still made, a suitcase with women's clothes draped over it, and a newspaper. The front page of the newspaper was clear: a Palm Beach paper, and the date would be easy to fix.

Shayne sat back in his chair and studied the picture. He had no doubt that this was the blackmail material. Rex Calin had gone to pains to hide it—so obviously no one would have found it unless they had had Shayne's experience and his certainty that it had to be in the room somewhere.

The man in the picture was not Dr. Ed Burrows.

Which one was important to Burrows? The girl or the man?

Shayne thought of the public position of the massive Dr. Burrows, a man who had to be above reproach—and his family also. The girl, then? A young wife? A sister? A daughter?

He was staring hard at the picture, sure that he had all he needed to break down Dr. Ed Burrows now, when his mental alarm went off in his head.

Someone was walking rapidly in the corridor.

Shayne froze a second—he had broken the police seal. Was it one of Gentry's men?

He glided fast into the cover behind the door.

He was too late.

The door burst open and a small figure came in like a bullet, all arms and legs pumping and swinging at the big redhead.

VI

MIKE SHAYNE took the first rush on his arms and chest. Small fists hammered at him like a child beating on a giant. In the melee Shayne saw a slim, boyish young man with jet black hair and dark, luminous eyes. Eyes that were flaming with fury above an almost girlish mouth.

Shayne pushed the boy away.

The boy bounced off the wall and came back again with wild determination.

Shayne hit him in the belly and the boy sat down hard with an ex-

plosion of breath like a balloon letting out sudden air.

Shayne towered over the boy. "Okay. What's this all about? Who are you?"

The boy gasped, glared up.

"Let's have it, boy," Shayne snapped.

The dark boy's mouth barely opened. "Go to hell!"

"You came up here after something, right?"

The boy just glared.

"Maybe you were here before? Last night? You came here, but you didn't get what you wanted? The picture?"

The boy snarled some oath, but still didn't move. As he spoke of the picture, Shayne realized that he had dropped it in the melee. He looked for it. He saw it on the floor near the boy. The boy watched his eyes.

Shayne started for the picture. Light gleamed in the dark youth's luminous eyes. His feet suddenly kicked out and caught Shayne's ankles. The redhead staggered. The boy's hand darted for the picture, got it, and he was up and running out the door.

Shayne lunged after him and missed.

The youth was in the corridor. Shayne was after him. The noise was bringing other people from their rooms. One was the same witness who had said Shayne looked like the man who had left Rex Calin's room last night.

Shayne tore through them all. The youth dashed for the elevators, looked once longingly at the indicators which showed that no elevators were near the floor, and hurriedly tried for the fire stairs down.

The door stopped him. He had it half open when Shayne caught him. In silence the small youth struggled to keep the picture. His breathing was furious, gasping, but he didn't say another word. Shayne got the picture.

In the corridor they were yelling: "Call the police!"

"Look at that big punk! He's killing the kid!"

"I seen him! He's the killer!" From the uncertain witness who was getting more certain.

As Shayne got the picture he had to release part of his grip on the youth, and he turned to snap at the gathering curious: "Get the police! Go on! I want—"

The youth tore free and made it through the fire door. Shayne went after him. The boy had the speed. By the time he reached the exit into the lobby the boy had fifty feet on him and was gone out the door.

In the street Shayne just had time to see the youth jump into a small sports car. The car had been waiting with the motor running. Someone else was behind the wheel. Shayne could not see who it was in the glare of sun that reflected from the windshield. The

car raced away before he could come near it.

He stood on the sidewalk, swearing. At least he still had the picture. Behind him in the hotel he heard shouts, and in the distance a police siren was wailing closer. He did not want to have to talk now. He hurried to his own car.

As he drove away he knew he wanted more to go on before he braced Dr. Ed Burrows.

He drove to the offices of The *Miami Daily News*. Tim Rourke was working in his small office, and jumped up when Shayne strode in. The elongated reporter's face was a picture of worry and concern.

"Mike? Anything new?"

"Maybe," Shayne said sprawling in a chair. "What did you dig up so far on Dr. Ed Burrows?"

"Nothing. He's a saint. At least he is since he gave up high steel work for the soul bit. About all that's funny about him is that he was once a weight-lifting champion, and still keeps in practice with the weights. Uses it, too. 'Raise the weight of pain and evil' and 'Strong in mind and body' are slogans of his. They say he sometimes lifts weights on stage to make his point. 'Clean in mind, body and soul' and 'Live clean and pure, lift the weight of trouble' are a couple of others of his."

"Nothing else? Nothing to blackmail?"

"Not that I can find. How bad is it?"

"Not as bad as it sounds on the police blotter, I hope," Shayne said. "What about Burrows's family?"

"Wife's dead. No girl trouble I can find. There's a daughter, Marcia, lives with him. About seventeen, one of his disciples. No boy problems I ever heard."

"One of his disciples? You mean part of his act?"

"In a way. He likes to show her off as an example of what youth should be like."

Shayne sat up. "Do you have any pictures?"

"Of Burrows? A ton."

"No, of her. The girl, Marcia Burrows."

"Nope. He doesn't believe in exploiting her, he says in public."

"You're sure she lives with him?"

"Let me check."

Rourke picked up the telephone and called the newspaper morgue. Shayne waited while the lean reporter had a fairly long talk. At last Rourke hung up.

"Our latest bio on Burrows says Marcia is in college here. They think she's maybe living near the campus now, but they're not sure. We keep a bio file, you know, for a possible obit. Standard procedure. Only the girl isn't central."

"But she may be living near the campus?"

"That's what they think. You

could call him and find out, I suppose."

Shayne stood up. "No, not if I can help it."

"You think she's behind it all somehow?"

"I'm getting that idea," Shayne said. "It sounds like just the right set-up for a blackmailer, especially a Dapper Dan like Rex Calin. Keep digging for me, Tim. I'll get back to you."

"Mike, be careful. If someone's out to hang a frame on you, they might get rough if you get close."

"If I get close, I'll get rough," Shayne said grimly.

He stopped in the lobby and called a friend out at the university. He asked for an address on Marcia Burrows. It took a few minutes, but he got it.

Marcia Burrows had been living in an apartment with a girl friend for the last year. Shayne got the address. He was beginning to feel on the trail.

VII

THE APARTMENT WAS in a complex of student housing at the edge of the campus. A neat, Florida-style apartment building with open balconies for each apartment. Mike Shayne rang, and a lazy girl's voice told him to come in, the door was open.

He went into a pleasant apartment that was filled with the clutter of two girls living together:



books, bric-a-brac, sweaters, bras, nightgowns all flung about on the chairs. He didn't see any girls.

"Out here!" the lazy female voice drawled.

Shayne went out onto the small balcony. A small, round blond lay on a chaise lounge. She wore a bikini in the noon sun. At least she was covered by a bikini where the law said she should be covered—barely. The top flimsy piece was just draped over a pair of abundant breasts. She smiled up at Shayne.

"Sun bathing. I could tell by your step you were male," she said, indicating the necessity for draping the top over herself. "Nicely male, too. My, you are a big one. Do I know you?"

It was not the girl in the picture. This one was about the same age, except that she was the kind of girl who was always the same age,

and was never really that young. Her whole body and smile carried the knowledge of centuries in every curve.

"You don't know me, and I'm looking for Marcia Burrows," Shayne said.

"You're not Marcia's type, she's a nice girl. I'm Anne Nasur. I'm your type. I'm busy tonight, but there's always tomorrow."

"Tomorrow never comes, honey," Shayne said. "Where is Marcia?"

"Who knows? Marcia is the faithful young lover. She suffers because men adore her and she can't give them all what they need. Now me, I don't suffer. I don't care what they need, I know what they all want whether they know it or not."

"Who is Marcia faithful to?"

Anne Nasur closed one eye and looked up at Shayne for a long ten count. Then she motioned him to turn around. He did. He heard her sit up behind him, heard the noise of fussing with straps.

"I don't really care. I figure you've seen girls before," she said behind him, "but mother told me a girl has to be modest at first, and I always do what momma says. Sometimes, anyway. Okay."

Shayne turned. She was sitting up and looking at him. She had tied the bra-top of the bikini. It really didn't make much difference. He watched her face and realized that she was at least fifty percent

decent. Her eyes and face were mature and intelligent as she studied him.

"Are you from her father?"

"Dr. Ed? Hell, no. I'm on her side. Tell me about who Marcia is faithful to."

"Both of them," Anne said simply. "One more than the other because he's weaker, needs her more. The damn fool kid. Oh boy, is he a weak one! And that gets to Marcia like catnip. She doesn't know it, but it's dear Doc Ed, the muscleman."

"What's Doc Ed?"

"Why, her need to have a weak man! What else? Doc Ed is all muscle—body and soul. Not brain, though. No, Doc Ed is all smart in the brain. With a soul of steel. Poor Marcia."

"Tell me about this weak man."

"Why? Who are you?"

"Mike Shayne. I'm a private detective. I think someone is using Marcia to blackmail Dr. Ed. Someone who found out about Marcia's men. Is there anything about them that would do for blackmail?"

"Against Marcia? Hell, no, not these days."

"Against Dr. Ed Burrows."

She pursed her full lips thoughtfully. "The stainless knight of the soul? Well, that could be."

"How?"

Anne Nasur didn't answer. She found a package of cigarettes, lit one slowly, and blew smoke at

Shayne. Her intelligent face showed that she was wondering if she had said a little too much already.

"Who hired you, Mr. Shayne?"

"Dr. Ed Burrows tried to. I wouldn't let him, so he's squeezing me some. Right now I'm on my own, trying to find a killer."

"Killer? Who was killed?"

"A nobody named Rex Calin. A con man, crook, blackmailer. Someone killed him. I think your Marcia might be in danger."

"So? Real danger?"

"I think so. I think Calin had something on her that he was using against Dr. Ed. Someone has killed already. I figure what Calin had on her was a man."

Anne Nasur blew more smoke. "Could be. What do you want from me?"

"Who is the man, Anne?"

She thought some more. "Okay. There's two. One's married."

"You know him?"

She nodded. "I know. Marcia had to talk to someone. It's absolutely hush-hush, but—"

Shayne watched her. "But what?"

She bit her lip. "Marcia's been gone since last night. I don't know where. She was supposed to be here."

The silence hung there like a threatening cloud. The implications were pretty clear. Marcia Burrows might be the cause of blackmail against her father, in-

volving another man. Rex Calin, who was probably the blackmailer, was dead. Marcia was not where she was supposed to be. Was she killer—or another victim?

"She could be in danger, Anne, one way or another," Shayne said. "Maybe she killed Rex Calin, maybe in self-defense but is running scared. Or maybe she knows who did kill him."

Anne Nasur got the point. "All right. No one knows about Marcia and Mert, but I guess she needs some help. Can I trust you, Shayne?"

"That's up to you to decide."

She chewed away at her lip, just a girl now, all the curves still there but the brass gone. "His name's Merton J. Phillips. He lives somewhere out on the north side. He's a weak man, Mr. Shayne. I've seen him. It fits right into Marcia's needs. Weak men are her thing."

"You don't know Phillips's actual address?"

"I've got the phone number, I think," Anne Nasur said and she walked into the living room.

Shayne watched her walk. She was very young; she had now forgotten her woman-of-the-world act and walked all unconscious of her bikini and the soft curves that filled it.

She found an address book and wrote down a telephone number. Shayne took it.

"You said there were two."

She nodded. "There's Al. There's always Al. He's a kid, nice, and he kind of worships Marcia. Only he doesn't need her the way Phillips does, you know? I mean, he's a kid, and he doesn't have a bitch of a wife, and he doesn't have Mert Phillips's world-weary line. He just wants a simple marriage."

"He's in love with her?"

"I guess so, a lot."

"Would he kill for her? To protect her?"

"I don't know. Maybe."

"And no one knew about this married man, Phillips?"

"Only me."

"Where did they meet?"

"Around. I think Phillips has a pad he took for them. They go up to Palm Beach sometimes."

"You knew that? Did you also know where they went in Palm Beach?"

"No. That I didn't know."

"Okay. Don't go far away, though," Shayne said.

He left Anne Nasur standing in the sunny living room looking lost in the bikini among the furniture.

VIII

MIKE SHAYNE found Merton J. Phillips in the telephone book, and the number checked with an address on the north side. He stopped for a couple of hamburg-

ers on the way. He hardly tasted them.

The house was a simple tract affair among fifty just like it. There had been little attempt to make it different, beyond one ugly and dispirited cactus that took up half the front lawn. Shayne parked just up the block in the curving street, and opened the door to get out.

He stopped.

In his rearview mirror he saw a man come out of the house—a big, dark-haired man wearing a gray suit. It was the man he had seen in the picture Rex Calin had had in the label of his suitcase. Shayne closed the car door and watched the man walk around the house and out of sight. He waited.

A car motor started, and a small, blue compact car backed from the driveway. It turned and came past Shayne. The man in it, who had to be Merton J. Phillips, didn't even glance at Shayne. Phillips was driving bent forward over the wheel like a *grand prix* driver in a close race.

Shayne followed. The blue compact led him across the city on to one of the causeways into Miami Beach. On the other side, Phillips drove on to a quiet apartment house surrounded by rows of sedate palm trees. Shayne waited until the man had parked, then got out and tailed him into the building.

Phillips got into an elevator.

Shayne sprinted up the stairs. The elevator passed the second floor. There were only four floors. Shayne raced on up the stairs and was at the third floor when Phillips stepped out and went along the corridor to an apartment door. Phillips unlocked the door with his own key and went inside.

Shayne listened at the door. He heard the man moving around, apparently alone. The redhead thought for a moment. This must be the apartment Anne Nasur had mentioned. Was Phillips waiting for Marcia Burrows? Or was the girl already inside, maybe not alive?

He looked around and saw a window at the end of the corridor. It was a fire escape window. The escape reached to the window of the apartment where Phillips had gone inside. Shayne climbed out and moved silently to the apartment window.

The shades were not drawn. The room inside was the living room. Merton Phillips paced the room. He was alone. To Shayne's eyes there was a sterile appearance to the room, like a room not lived in much.

Shayne watched cautiously, but Phillips had too much on his mind to even glance at a window. Shayne had a hunch that Phillips wouldn't see him if the man looked straight at him. Nervous anxiety seemed to pour from the pacing man in waves.



After some fifteen minutes, Phillips suddenly stopped pacing and vanished into an inside room. Shayne waited. Another ten minutes passed. Phillips came out with a small suitcase. The married man set it down and went around the living room, picking up articles here and there. It did not take long. There was little to pick up. What Phillips did gather he took to his suitcase and packed in.

Then the nervous man sat down, looked at his watch, and looked at the telephone. That took another ten minutes. Nothing happened. Phillips got up and vanished again into some inner room. This time he returned quickly, carrying a bottle and a glass. He sat down, poured, drank, and stared off into space.

Drank and stared, and from time to time looked at the silent telephone. Then, two drinks later,

began to cry. A silent, solitary, hopeless kind of crying that Shayne knew made no sound in the silent room inside the window. Mouth open, tears trickling down. Then, faint, Shayne heard the sounds of low moaning like a sick man at the end of his life—and the sudden ringing of the telephone.

Phillips jumped, stared at the phone. The ringing went on as if faint and distant to Shayne's ears, and he wanted to shout to the drinking man to pick it up! *Pick it up!*

Phillips picked it up. A transformation came over his sodden face. It seemed to grow, firm, acquire a character. He began to talk, earnestly, seriously. Shayne strained to hear but he couldn't. It looked like Phillips was pleading, and then his manner changed again. A calmness came over his mobile face. He spoke for some time, quietly, into the phone. Then he just as quietly hung up.

Shayne watched him sit there for another few minutes.

Phillips drained his drink, vanished into what had to be the kitchen again. Soon he came back carrying the glass and the bottle. He packed them both into the suitcase, looked around once more, closed the suitcase, and walked toward the door.

Shayne slid back to the corridor window. Phillips came out, locked the door, and rang for the ele-

vator. When he was on the car, Shayne climbed in and hurried down the stairs. It was a slow elevator and once again he beat it down.

Shayne saw Phillips come from the elevator, carrying the bag.

He saw the dark boy at the same time.

The boy was waiting in the small, deserted lobby of the apartment house. Shayne watched from the stairs door. The boy stood up and blocked Phillips's path.

The older man said something and tried to push on past. The dark boy snarled and swung wildly. Hit, Phillips staggered back and dropped the suitcase. The boy leaped and swung again. Phillips blocked this time and hit the boy hard. The boy went down. Phillips seemed to bend over to help him up. Suddenly, the boy had a gun.

Phillips twisted, fell back.

Shayne jumped from his cover and ran toward them. The boy was up, the little gun in his hand, ugly and ready. He saw Shayne and shot. Shayne went down on his nose and skidded across the floor. The shot went wild. Shayne came up running but the boy was already out the door. Outside the boy was too far away and running.

Shayne went back to Phillips. The shaken man was picking up his suitcase.

"Thanks, mister. Lucky you happened along," Phillips said.

"Do you know who he was?"

Phillips nodded. "I know. A friend of a friend. I'm afraid he's got a kind of grudge against me."

"Does he have a name?" Shayne asked.

Phillips looked surprised. "Yes, of course, but—"

The man stopped, stared at Shayne. "You didn't just happen along, did you? Who are you? What do you want?"

"The name's Mike Shayne, and I want to talk to you."

Something flickered in Phillips's eyes. Whatever it was the man covered fast. "Why me?"

"You're Merton Phillips?"

"Yes, but—"

"Let's drive back to your place and have our talk," Shayne said. "And what was that kid's name?"

"Al Banda."

"You go first," Shayne said. "I'll follow—and I know where you live."

IX

SHE WAS A tall, slender woman with dark hair and a proud, strong face. "Where did you go, Merton? And who is this?"

She was in the doorway into the living room of Phillips's house as Shayne and the big man walked in. An elegant woman who spoke with a highly-educated voice. Her green dress set off her slender figure. A good figure, and she knew how good it was. She drew in her breath when she saw Shayne,

arched her back almost imperceptibly to raise her fine breasts.

"I had some business, Carol," Phillips said. "And this is Mr. Shayne. We'll go into the library."

Her eyes studied her husband. "No, I don't think you will. Something is happening, Merton, and I want to know what it is."

Shayne said, "It's a private matter, Mrs. Phillips."

"No, Mr. Shayne, it isn't," she said. "I don't happen to believe in private matters where my husband is concerned. We have no secrets from each other. Are you one of those men who think women aren't your equals?"

"Not me," Shayne said. "I think women are women."

She smiled, arched to raise her breasts, and smoothed her belly with her hands. Her husband watched her. Shayne saw a small smile hidden on his face. There was a violent undercurrent in the Phillips household. Shayne sensed it.

"All right, Carol," Phillips said. "You're right. We've always shared everything—or almost everything. We'll talk in the living room."

The big man strode into the living room leaving his wife to follow with Shayne. She walked like a cat, yet with a smooth, almost masculine stride. Shayne took a seat in an armchair. Phillips stood against a wall. Mrs. Phillips, Carol, sat on the couch.

"All right, Shayne. What do you want to talk about?" Phillips said, his eyes showing a certain flash.

"What do you know about Rex Calin?" Shayne said bluntly.

"Rex Calin?" Phillips mused. "Nothing. Never heard of him."

"Nor did I," Carol Phillips said. "Who is he?"

"He's dead," Shayne said. "He was a small-time crook and con man. It looks like he tried his hand at blackmail and got burned."

"Blackmail?" Carol Phillips said. "Why on earth would you come to us? What makes you think Merton would know a man like that?"

"I didn't say he did," Shayne said, "but he knew Merton. At least, he knew him by sight. Did you know that, Phillips?"

"That this Rex Calin knew me by sight? No, I didn't. I expect a lot of people do. I'm in real estate, you know."

"Palm Beach real estate?" Shayne snapped.

Phillips didn't even blink. "Sometimes I go up there."

Carol Phillips said, "Really, Mr. Shayne, I suggest you come to the point. It strikes me that if you think Merton has some information about a petty blackmailer you must have some special reason."

"I have a special reason," Shayne said. "What I'm trying to figure out is just where your

husband fits—victim or partner."

Phillips came away from the wall with his fists clenched. Shayne didn't move.

"If you're suggesting that I had anything to do with that filthy rat's trying to use—" Phillips roared, and stopped.

Carol Phillips stared at her husband. Shayne watched them both. He saw a strange struggle on Phillips's face. First there was surprise, then a chalk-white fear, and then a shuddering breath, and finally a sudden slow smile—as if Merton Phillips had just broken through a powerful barrier.

Shayne said, "You want to tell me what you do know now, Phillips? You know Al Banda, and you knew Rex Calin."

Carol Phillips just sat there as if she was seeing something that she could not believe. Phillips turned his slow smile toward her, nodded and then looked back at Mike Shayne.

"Okay, Shayne. I wasn't going to tell Carol yet, but since you force my hand this is as good a time as any. Now, I'm going to tell you all I know just once. I'm not going to answer any questions. When I finish, you'll leave. Is that clear?"

"Speak your piece," Shayne said.

Carol Phillips said, "Merton? You do know—"

"Just listen, Carol," Phillips said, and he looked at Shayne,

"I knew nothing about Rex Calin until today, when Marcia told me about his attempt to blackmail Burrows. I've known Al Banda for some time, of course. He's my rival. He's a boy and Marcia's much too good for him. I intend to have Marcia, no matter what her father tries to do, or any Rex Calins. But I know nothing about the blackmail."

"You think you're just right for Marcia?" Shayne said.

"Yes. She needs me, and I need her."

"She's seventeen, Phillips! You're married!"

Carol Phillips was on her feet. "Merton! You—"

"Shut up, Carol," Phillips snapped. "We'll talk when Shayne leaves. We've needed to talk for a long time."

Shayne said, "Where were you last night, Phillips?"

"Here. I was here all night. Wasn't I, Carol?"

The tall, dark woman stood with her mouth open and the fear now in her eyes—fear and something else that could have been a great rage growing. "What? Here? Yes, yes he was here. Merton, this Marcia. She—"

Phillips said, "Satisfied, Shayne? Calin was using my relation with Marcia to blackmail her father. That is it's only connection to me. Now get out."

"Mrs. Phillips," Shayne said. "Was he here? Rex Calin was

killed sometime around eleven. Was your husband here then?"

Carol Phillips shook her head and made a gesture as if she were brushing away a fly. She wasn't even looking at Shayne. She was watching her husband.

Phillips stood and returned her gaze. Shayne had the feeling of looking at two jungle animals facing each other in some mortal struggle.

"Yes," Carol Phillips said, "he was here. Now go away."

Shayne said, "Maybe you weren't here either, Mrs. Phillips."

Because it had suddenly occurred to Shayne that there had been two people in the blackmail picture. Rex Calin might have been working both ends. Phillips was a real estate man with a position in the community. Maybe Calin had been squeezing him, too, and had been killed for that.

"I was here," Carol Phillips said. "Now do you leave, or do we call the police?"

"And don't come back without the police," Phillips said. "And if you're thinking Calin was blackmailing me, just think about this: I'm going to marry Marcia Burrows. There was no way he could blackmail me."

Carol Phillips sat down slowly as Phillips said that. The two of them had forgotten Shayne was in the room. He was not going to get anything more from them now.

He left and they didn't even notice him go. Outside in his car Shayne sat and listened for a time. The house was ominously silent. There was a struggle going on in there, a strange kind of struggle Shayne could not pin down. But he knew one thing—Merton Phillips was in a kind of exalted mood, above himself, at a strange kind of ease.

The ease of a man who has done something he had to do? Like killing a snake who threatened his girl friend?

X

IT WAS AFTER three when Mike Shayne strode into his office. Lucy Hamilton looked up with a worried expression. "Is it all right, Michael?"

"Not yet, Angel, but we're getting there. Any calls?"

"Tim Rourke called. He said he had nothing at all to report. As far as he can tell Burrows never did anything wrong."

"There's always a first time," Shayne said.

"Chief Gentry called to say that they can't find anything more on Rex Calin. He said at least there were no other witnesses for or against."

"That's something. What about Ed Burrows's movements last night? Did Will say anything about that?"

"He said they can't trace it

down. Burrows could have been out around eleven, but no one can say yes or no."

"Swell," Shayne groaned. "I've got five—no, six if you count the girl friend, Anne Nasur—suspects who had reason to want the blackmail stopped. So far none of them are ruled out. None of them are killers, but no blackmail victim is, usually. A blackmailer can make a killer out of anyone, and everyone I've met so far is capable of violence."

"What are you going to do?"

"Think, and then see what Marcia Burrows can tell me—if she's still alive."

The redhead stalked on into his private office, tossed his panorama on the hatrack, and slumped into his chair behind his desk. He thought about Al Banda. The boy had violence in him and he was just the type to protect a woman's honor. But Banda had come back to the murder scene.

For the picture? It had to be.

Why hadn't Burrows come after the picture yet? Was it that he didn't know what Calin had had? Or because he couldn't find it, and was now too scared to try, hoping no one would find it? Or had Rex Calin had a partner who was now putting the heat on Dr. Ed Burrows, making the print Shayne had irrelevant?

He was still mulling over this, and planning how to approach Burrows again, when he heard

the sudden commotion in his outer office. He grabbed his desk automatic and jumped for the door. It opened as he got there.

Lucy Hamilton backed into the office. Al Banda was facing her, with Lucy between him and Shayne and the small pistol almost against Lucy's stomach.

"Drop it, Mr. Shayne," Banda said, his voice taut and shaky.

Lucy said nothing. Shayne felt his stomach go down to his shoes. Banda was scared and nervous and had a gun ready to use on Lucy! Shayne dropped his automatic and stepped back.

"Okay, Banda. Let her go!"

Al Banda just licked at his lips, then nodded. Lucy stepped away into a corner. Banda now held the gun on Shayne. The redhead looked at the gun. It was a small caliber, a .22 long-rifle J.C. Higgins Model 85. A toy gun, but with a ten-shot magazine, it was lethal as anything at the range.

"Back away, Mr. Shayne. Sit down where I can see your hands," Banda croaked, his whole body shaking with nerves.

Shayne backed away and sat down. Lucy Hamilton began to edge toward the door to get behind Banda.

Shayne shook his head, and Banda looked at her.

"Don't, please! I don't want to shoot."

Lucy stopped. Shayne watched the youth. Most men can't kill



easily, and he was sure Banda couldn't, unless he was so scared all his normal restraints were off, and Banda was scared.

"What do you want, Banda?" Shayne said. "This won't get you anywhere. Put it down and then we'll talk."

Banda shook his head. "There's nothing to talk about. I want that picture you got, and I want you to leave Marcia alone."

"I haven't even seen Marcia yet, Al. Where is she?" Shayne said quietly.

Banda needed to be calmed. If Shayne could calm him down enough, the youth might come around to reason.

"She's safe. No one's going to hurt her anymore, you hear? I just want that picture. I want this to stop. That dirty blackmailer deserved to die. Marcia's gone

through enough, and I don't want you stirring up anything more!"

"I can't help it, Al. They've got the killing pinned on me. I'm out on bail now. I've got to find out who killed Calin. There's no other way. You'll have to shoot me to stop me, and I need the picture."

Banda blinked. "You? They think you killed him?"

"Yes."

Lucy Hamilton cried, "And he didn't! Someone is framing him! Maybe you, you—"

"That's enough, Lucy," Shayne interrupted. "Al understands, don't you, Al? I can't stop."

Banda seemed to sway, and his hand shook. Shayne tensed, but the boy steadied. His eyes were flat, tortured.

When he began to speak it was as if from a distance, as if he was talking to someone not even in the room.

"He deserved to die, that filthy pig. I love Marcia. I always have, since we were kids. That father of hers! The hypocrite! His holy act and all he ever wanted was money. Money and more money! He scared her all his life, pushed her around, drove her mother crazy with his domineering! She never had a chance to live, to love, anyone. How could you love a man who tyrannized you, made you part of his act, never let you free, and all the time was a phony?"

Banda waved the gun, and

Shayne watched it the way a bird watches a snake. Banda raved on: "He never let her have a mind of her own. I tried to help, but I'm not something she can pity like Phillips! Burrows hates me. He hates any man who comes near Marcia. A slave, that's what she's been, but no more. He'll lock her up if he gets her, anything to keep his filthy racket going, to con his suckers!"

Banda stopped, breathing hard. His eyes were seeing Dr. Ed Burrows and Marcia. Hate filled his eyes. Hate and a deep hope that somehow he could help the girl Shayne had never seen except in the picture, but who was at the heart of it all.

The question was: had Banda helped her already by killing Rex Calin?

Shayne never took his eyes from the gun. "Listen to me, Al. Someone killed Rex Calin. I didn't. When I find who did, Marcia'll be free. I'll see to that, I promise. Ed Burrows can't keep her a slave, if I have to let out all about her and Phillips and let him take it."

"No! You keep quiet! Don't you understand? She loves him, her father, as much as she hates him. She feels she's let him down. She thinks her father killed Calin, and she thinks she made him do it! She—"

Banda got no farther. The inner door burst open again and a small,

dark, slender girl came in. It was the girl in the picture!

"Al!"

She looked at the gun in Banda's hand. She lunged toward him, her face stricken with horror.

In that instant Shayne leaped over the desk and knocked the gun across the room.

Banda cried out and tried to run for the gun. Lucy Hamilton got there first and kicked it away. Banda whirled to go after it and met Shayne's fist in full swing.

Banda collapsed as if struck by lightning.

Marcia Burrows stood with her hand over her mouth to stifle a scream, then dropped to her knees beside the fallen youth.

Shayne picked up the small gun and his own automatic.

XI

LUCY HAMILTON was back in the outer office with the outer door locked. Al Banda, his eyes clearing, sat in a chair facing Mike Shayne. Marcia Burrows sat beside him. Shayne was in his desk chair and held both guns.

"Okay," Shayne said, "suppose we get the whole story as far as you two know it."

Banda said, "Leave Marcia out, she didn't do anything except get mixed up with the wrong guy. I killed Calin!"

"No!" Marcia said. "I killed him! I found out what he was do-

ing, and I went to the Packwood. I tried to reason with him, but he only laughed at me. He said I didn't have any money, but my father did; and he was going to deal with him! So I took out the gun, meaning to scare him. He jumped on me and it went off."

Banda said, "No, she—"

"Shut up," Shayne snapped. He looked at the pretty young girl. "What room at the Packwood?"

"Room forty-seven."

"What gun did you use?"

"Gun? The other one like that. Just like Al had. It's Daddy's. He had two. I stole them both, and Al got that one."

"So he jumped on you and the gun just went off? The shot must have scared you pretty bad."

"Oh it did! I can still hear it! I looked down at him, and I knew he was dead. I ran."

"Once through the heart, that'll kill a man," Shayne said.

The girl looked white. "I know. I ran and ran and then I hid at Al's apartment."

Banda had been swearing the whole time she was talking. Now he leaned forward, both hands against Shayne's desk. "She's lying! You hear me, Shayne? I went up there. She told me what Calin was doing, how bad it was for her. Okay, she was worried most about Phillips, I don't care about that. Calin was hurting her. He was going to make her suffer more with a scandal or with what her crazy

father would do to her. So I went up and I killed him and it wasn't any accident!"

"Then you came back to find the picture?"

"Yes. I didn't have time to find it then. I heard someone coming—her father! So I beat it and went back later. That's when I found you there."

"You say you shot Calin with this gun?"

Banda started to nod, and stopped quickly. "No, not that one, the other one. Like Marcia says, they're a pair. I threw the other one into Biscayne Bay."

"That's a lie, Mr. Shayne," Marcia Burrows cried. "I can prove it's a lie. The other gun is at home. My Dad has it."

"I tell you I shot him," Banda insisted. "I was there looking for the picture, you know that."

"Close range? Once through the heart? You're that good a shot?"

"No, but I got real close," Banda said.

Shayne leaned back and watched them both. He toyed with the small automatic. He broke it and looked at the magazine. One shot gone. That would be the shot Banda had fired at him in the lobby of Phillips's apartment house. He laid the pistol down again.

"All right, you're both lying. You know it, and I know it. Now let's hear the real story. Marcia,

you tell me what happened right from the start."

"We're not lying!" Banda said.

"He is, I'm not," Marcia said.

Shayne said, "Stop it! You're both lying! Neither of you shot Calin or were there when he was shot. He was shot twice, not once. Twice, you hear? Now, Marcia, tell me!"

They were silent. Banda stared at the floor between his feet. Marcia Burrows twisted her hands together in a paroxysm of despair. When she spoke her small voice was like a sad child.

"I love Merton. He needs me. He's had a terrible life with Carol. She's a cold woman who cares more how she looks to men than she does for love. I've seen women like her before. They're like my father—they want men to admire them but never touch them! Liars and hypocrites—cold, cold!"

"So you met Phillips in Palm Beach, and somehow Calin found out. He knew who you were, and he got that picture?"

She nodded. "I don't care. Merton and I are going to be married. There was nothing wrong. But—"

"But?" Shayne said.

"But I'm only seventeen. My father could send me away, get Merton in trouble if it all came out. Merton doesn't care about his job—he has some money of his own, an inheritance—but he cares about me. My father will

lock me up, do anything to hide me now!"

"And kill to hide what's happened?"

"No!" Marcia cried, "Not that, no! Daddy is a terrible man, but he wouldn't kill. He wouldn't kill—on purpose. No!"

The conflict on the girl's face was obvious. Her mind was caught in a maelstrom of whirling troubles. Someone had killed Rex Calis. She did not want it to be her father. She did not want it to be her lover, Merton Phillips. She did not want it to be Al Banda. Who then? Herself. She was one of those weak, soft people who have the courage to blame only themselves, who can face responsibility only for themselves.

"You knew about the Hotel Packwood and room forty-seven, tell me about that," Shayne said.

Marcia shuddered. "We knew, Merton and I, that someone had seen us in Palm Beach. We didn't know about the picture. Merton couldn't get the courage to tell Carol he wanted a divorce. He's not a strong man, not after what Carol did to him. So we waited. Then, two days ago, I knew that something was wrong.

"My father became furious. He tried to make me come home to stay. I refused, but I went home secretly and watched. He got a call from some slimy man who told him to deliver fifty thousand dollars to room forty-seven, Hotel



Packwood. I saw him go to you. I followed. When he came out he was in a terrible rage. I guessed that you had refused to help him.

"I decided to go to the Packwood. I went. Rex Calin was there. He only laughed at me. He told me he was sorry, but he had to live. He was vicious. He threw me out and I left. That's all I know."

Shayne turned to Banda. "How about you?"

"I was there, too. Only Calin was already dead when I got there. I tried to find the picture, but couldn't. Then I heard Dr. Burrows coming and I ran."

Shayne considered them. Everyone had been there. They had lied before, were they lying now? How deep in it were they all?

"So you two were there, and you say Dr. Burrows was there.

What about Merton Phillips? Was he there?"

"No!" Marcia cried. "Don't you try to hurt Merton!"

Banda snarled, "I'll bet he killed him, sure! He's a lousy coward, afraid of that wife of his! He turns to mush every time that wife swings her hip and sneers at him. He likes the way she bosses him! He'd be scared to death that Calin would tell her about him and Marcia. He killed Calin!"

"He doesn't seem scared now," Shayne said. "Not of his wife, anyway."

Marcia Burrows was on her feet. "He isn't. I've made him face himself. He's going to leave her, and we're going to be married, no matter what!"

Banda said, "Don't, Marcia. Please. He's all wrong for you. You and me, it's always been you and me."

She looked at Banda. She was one of the sorrowful lovers; she had to have suffering. "I'm sorry, Al. You'll surely find someone for you."

Banda sat there looking at her. Then he uttered a strangled cry, and ran out the door. In the outer office Lucy Hamilton tried to stop him.

Shayne called, "Let him go, Angel."

The outer door closed with a slam. Shayne and Marcia Burrows sat alone. The pretty young girl

was looking at her hands, tears in her eyes.

"I guess you can go, too, Miss Burrows. I wouldn't try to do anything drastic until we know more about what happened to Rex Calin."

She shook her head. "I'll do what I have to, Mr. Shayne."

"Yes, I guess you will," Shayne said.

She went out. Shayne sat back and scowled. The youngsters were both lying. But how much? They had told stories easily tripped up by the facts. On purpose? One lying story to be broken so that no one would think that the lie covered a bigger lie?

"It had been done before."

They both admitted they had been in room forty-seven. Maybe they knew that sooner or later that would be discovered, so they told lies easily disproved, then told what looked like the reluctant truth. Only was that a lie, too, and one of them, or both in a conspiracy, killed Rex Calin?

Shayne didn't know. He jumped up, clapped on his panama, and went out after Marcia Burrows.

XII

MIKE SHAYNE caught up with the girl in front of his building on Flagler Street. She was getting into a small car, the same sports car he had seen Al Banda jump into and drive away early this

morning at the Hotel Packwood.

Shayne climbed into his own car. As far as he could see, Marcia Burrows was alone in the car. She drove off with Shayne not far behind.

She went across the city without any obvious attempt to shake Shayne. He realized, soon, that she was driving to her apartment near the campus.

When she got there she parked and went up. Shayne parked and waited.

It was a long wait. Shayne was getting hungry, but he had no time to stop and eat now. He sensed that he had set wheels turning, and that soon his number was going to come up.

It came slowly.

Just after dark, Marcia Burrows came out. No one had gone in, but apartments had telephones. The girl hurried to her sports car. Shayne took up the trail again. She drove faster this time, back across the city toward her father's house.

The garish neon sign on the big brick house was in sight when the car came out of the dark side street. Shayne had no chance. He had been concentrating on the girl ahead, and on the neon-lighted building, and the car was on him before he could move a muscle.

A big car, black, hurling out of the dark side street straight at him. Not at full speed, just fast

enough to use his own speed against him.

There was only one chance the redhead could take. He tromped down on the gas and his car leaped ahead.

He was almost clear, past, going after the sports car.

The big black car caught him just at the rear, turned his car sideways, tires screaming, the car swaying over.

Shayne fought it, tapped the brake, steered. All no use. A light pole came up sideways, he hit, bounced, went over and his head struck something hard.

He did not pass out. There was the smell of gasoline. He fought glass and steel, pushed, saw light and squeezed toward it.

Then he was on his knees somewhere, on some kind of ground . . . concrete. There was a curb. Lights and fog swam in his head and something stabbed into his arm.

There were hands.

Faces.

A face looked like a girl in a picture. Marcia!

Dr. Ed Burrows grinned from a halo of gold.

Hands pawed him, poked, and he pushed them away and stood up, swaying.

He was on his hands and knees, now. He realized that he had fallen again and suddenly there were no hands and no faces but only a street, hard and dark,

with street lights weak and scattered.

His head cleared and he stood up, still shaky but without a sway this time.

There was no one on the street. His car lay on its side, wheels still turning slowly. He looked at his watch. It couldn't have been more than two or three minutes. The big black car was gone. Now people were coming from various places. A police siren growled up.

Shayne felt his body, his face. He was unhurt, not a scratch. A tender spot on his head was the only damage. He had been groggy for only a few moments, in mild shock—partly from the blow, and partly from the reflex panic of escaping the car and the smell of gasoline.

"You okay?" the patrolman said as he walked up from his car.

"Yeah, I'm okay."

"What happened?"

"Car came out of that side street. I tried to avoid him, skidded, got clipped in the rear, and ended up like that. I missed his license number."

"I saw it," a witness said. "It's like the guy says. The other guy stopped and helped drag him out, then beat it. There was a woman, too, in a sports car. I guess she tried to help."

Shayne then remembered the faces and hands—Marcia's face, and Dr. Burrows's face. While the patrolman made his report and

called a tow truck, Shayne searched his pockets. The picture was gone.

So he had not imagined Marcia and Dr. Burrows. They had the picture—his only evidence that there had been a blackmail plot!

He swore at himself for a fool.

They all seemed too worked up, worried, amateurish. But they had taken his only real evidence of a motive for the murder of Rex Calin.

He stepped to the patrolman. "You've got my name and license. Check me out with Chief Gentry. I have to leave in a hurry now. My office is on Flagler Street. Tell the tow truck to take the car, fix it, and call me there. Okay?"

"Well, I guess it's okay. I've got the witnesses' stories, Mr. Shayne. You sure you're okay?"

"Yeah, I'm okay."

The redhead hurried off to the nearest public telephone. He called Lucy Hamilton to bring her car to Burrows headquarters. Then he walked the block to the gaudy neon-signed building. He went around to the rear and the residence. There were no cars in the garage.

The house itself was dark except for a faint light in the distant interior. Shayne checked all the windows. All the rooms were dark.

He rang the bell, wishing for the first time that he was carrying his gun.

The old woman opened the door. Shayne asked for Burrows.

"He's not here."

"How about Marcia?"

"Miss Marcia doesn't live here now. She hasn't been here to-day."

"Where did they go? You better tell me."

"Police?"

"In a way."

"That don't make you anything at all. Anyway, I can't tell you what I don't know."

She shut the door in his face.

Shayne rubbed his lean jaw, thought. Then he went back to the street.

Five minutes later Lucy drove up. Shayne got behind the wheel of her car without a word and drove her home.

"Stay put. I've got some hunting to do."

"Please be careful."

"Too late for that, Angel," Shayne said grimly.

He drove off to the house of Merton Phillips. There was light in the small tract house. Shayne knocked long and loud. Carol Phillips came to the door at last. She wore only a filmy negligee. She had a lot to offer.

She seemed to be offering it to him—automatically, not really aware of what she was doing, by sheer habit.

"Where's your husband?" Shayne snapped.

"I don't know."



"He's not here? Where is he? You better tell me."

She didn't answer. She looked up at Shayne, but her eyes weren't seeing him. "He's going to leave me, divorce me. Or maybe he won't. Maybe he'll just stay with me. He's changed, you know? He's changed all at once. Like that. After all these years."

"Is he with Marcia Burrows, Mrs. Phillips?"

"I don't know. Probably. That girl. I don't know where he is. I'll never really know now, will I? No."

Shayne left her standing there in the doorway with the light behind her through the negligee. She still stared at nothing at all—or at something only she could see.

XIII

THE MIAMI BEACH apartment where Mike Shayne had seen Phillips crying in his booze earlier showed lights. He parked and got out. He looked up at the window through the fire escape.

Shadows crossed the drawn shades. There were shadows in quick, violent movement. He thought he heard voices, loud but muffled and the faint scream of a woman.

He hurried to the entrance lobby. Before he reached the doors Marcia Burrows came out. The girl was running, her hair wild and disordered, her dress torn at the top, her legs shining as her skirt billowed as she ran across the lobby.

Shayne grabbed at her. She fought him, in silence, tears streaming from her wild eyes. She was like a wildcat, her eyes blind to everything but her purpose in running, the inner nightmare she was seeing.

"Marcia! Stop it! What's going on up—"

She snarled like an animal. Shayne needed both hands to hold her. He bent her arm to force her around.

The shot spat in the night like a snapping twig. Something struck the sidewalk to Shayne's left. He let the girl go and dove. She didn't seem to care who was shooting or why. The instant she was loose

she ran down the street and vanished.

There were no more shots.

The shade in the love-nest apartment was up. Shayne jumped up and started for the lobby doors again. He reached them just as the stairs door inside burst open and Dr. Ed Burrows came out. Shayne ducked back in the night, flattened against the wall.

Burrows crashed through the doors in fury. There was a streak of blood on his face. His massive body moved with amazing speed, and hate contorted his big face as he wiped the streak of blood and succeeded only in smearing it. He thundered off in the same direction as Marcia.

Shayne didn't move until Burrows was out of sight. Then he went into the lobby. The blood on Burrow's face told him that someone else was up in the apartment. He rode the elevator to the third floor and knocked on the door.

"Damn you, I told—"

Merton Phillips stood there in his shirt sleeves. There was blood on his shirt. He stared at Mike Shayne from eyes that were deep and dangerous with anger and a strange sense of power.

"Shayne! What the hell do you want?"

"I want you. What happened up here?"

"That's a private affair!"

Shayne pushed the big real

estate man out of the way and strode into the apartment. The place was a mess. There had been a fight. Shayne raised a ragged red eyebrow and turned to look at the real estate man and lover.

"You fought with Burrows? What did you use to beat him, black magic?"

Big as Phillips was, and whatever fair shape he was in, Shayne doubted that the real estate man could have stood up to Dr. Ed Burrows for long. Phillips hadn't stood up alone.

"No," Phillips said, "just this."

A small gun appeared in Phillips's hand. It was the mate of the J.C. Higgins Model 85 .22 automatic. Phillips held it on Shayne.

"Now, what do you want? I've got some matters to settle," Phillips said. "Have you found who killed Rex Calin yet?"

"No. Any ideas?"

"None. Burrows would seem logical, but I'm not accusing him. Al Banda has a hell of a temper, and he thinks of himself as a knight in armor protecting Marcia?"

"What do you think of yourself as?"

Phillips laughed. "Me, eh? Well, maybe, but you're going to have to do some proving. If you can, you better not tell me, eh? I can only hang once."

"Not exactly," Shayne said. "That's a mistake many killers

make. You can only get life once, but every killing makes it more certain you'll get caught for one of them."

"I'll remember that. Now what do you want?"

"I want to know where you were last night."

"My wife told you."

"I don't believe your wife. What's going on with you two, Phillips?"

"None of your damned business!" Phillips raged.

"I'm making it my business. For all I know she might have killed Rex Calin. I just saw her, and she's acting kind of odd."

"Is she?" Phillips said, and he seemed to be seeing something as far away as Carol Phillips had been seeing in her doorway. "I'm sorry, really I am. I'm afraid it's all been a shock to her."

"How much of a shock?" Shayne snapped.

Phillips took a deep, shuddering breath. He looked at Shayne. He suddenly laid his pistol down on the table.

"How about a drink?"

"I thought you'd moved out? End of affair."

"You were watching? Yes, I was going to call it off, but I just can't. I've waited for Marcia a long time. For Marcia and all she means."

"What does she mean? I'll take what you have."

Phillips went into the kitchen.

He came back with two glasses with ice and water. It was bourbon, and good bourbon. Shayne drank. Phillips sat down, his big hands clasped between his knees. Shayne sat facing him.

"I've always been a weak type, Shayne," Phillips said. "A nice, weak guy with no gall in him. I fell for Carol hard. I was just a kid then. So was she, but I think she knew what she was doing. She's the kind of woman who's more worried about her rights than about love. She had a chip on her shoulder from the day we were married. I don't know what makes her tick, not even now. All I know is that I should have knocked that chip off her shoulder the first month."

Phillips took a drink. His eyes were vacant as if he were talking not to Shayne but to himself. "I should have knocked off that chip. The marriage would either have ended right then and there, or it would have become a real marriage. I didn't knock it off. It's been there every day of our marriage, and I haven't been a man for a long time. It hasn't been a marriage; it's been a business partnership and a battlefield."

Phillips stood, began to pace. "I don't hold a lot for being a 'man', in capital letters, but she hasn't had a chance to be a woman, either. My fault. I never knocked off that chip and gave

her a chance to decide what she would be. So she's a woman who has no respect for her man, who dresses up for the supermarket and strangers, displays herself for all other men and loves their eyes on her, but has a headache when we go to bed—night after night for years and years!

"A woman who needs admiration, who loves her own body, but who is too tired to love her man. She despises me, and she has every right to. For years we just drifted in a sniping battle. A war, and I never gave her a chance to become a human, a woman. Then Marcia came along. She wanted me. She's a woman. I began to feel like a man again, and I'm not going to lose it."

Phillips stopped, drained his glass. Shayne drank and studied the real estate man.

"That means you plan to marry Marcia no matter what?"

"Yes."

"And Doc Burrows objects?"

"He does, but I'm going to have it out with him once and for all. He can't keep her his slave forever, I won't let him! I've got a second chance, and a chance to help someone else, too."

Phillips drank, found his glass empty, and looked at Shayne. "One more?"

Shayne nodded. The real estate man took the glasses and went into the kitchen. Shayne

quickly set the safety on the small automatic and returned to his seat. Phillips came back and continued talking as if he had never stopped. Shayne drank, watched him. There was something manic about Phillips, something unreal that Shayne couldn't place, as if Phillips were talking about a dream he knew would never happen.

"It's something I have to do. I'm a free man, Shayne! You understand that? I'm a man again, and I'm free! I can act now, do something, be alive!"

"She's only seventeen. Burrows has rights. If he wants to stop you, he will. And he's a tough man."

"There are ways," Phillips said, smiling like a shark. "Two can play at blackmail. That dirty Calin wanted money. I can use the same pressure to free Marcia. He didn't give me a chance here, but I'm going to have it out with him. He agrees to let us marry, to set her loose from his hypocrisy, or I ruin him!"

"Did Marcia give you the picture she took from me?"

"Picture? No, I have no picture, I don't need it. I can tell the world!"

"And Al Banda? He won't take it lightly."

Phillips seemed to sway in thought, his big frame leaning in the room. Shayne blinked as he drank. Phillips began to pace again.

"Al's a good kid, in his way, but he's all wrong for Marcia. She needs more man, and less man, if you know what I'm getting at. She needs to feel she's sustaining a man, and yet she needs to lean, too. Al is all boy; he couldn't do either."

Shayne nodded. It was all very logical. Of course, Phillips was best for Marcia. Why hadn't he



seen that before? Phillips would do anything for Marcia. Now—

Shayne shook his head. Phillips was floating, swaying. Shayne stood up, tried to stand. He sat back.

Phillips was talking, "—sorry, but I've got to have it out with Burrows. I need some time—time—got to get Marcia loose from that man—loose—sorry—while there's still time for Marcia—sorry—

Shayne forced himself to his feet. The second drink—Drugged—Phillips's face in front. Hit! Hit—Hard against his shoulder—the floor—a table leg.

Silence.

XIV

MIKE SHAYNE came out of it with a pounding head and a taste in his mouth that made him gag.

He lay where he was. He saw the table leg. It seemed like moments ago he had seen that table leg. He touched the table leg to be sure it was there.

Moments ago.

He sat up. Was Phillips gone yet? There was no sound in the apartment. The pistol was gone.

Shayne looked around slowly and saw the sunlight. He shook his head. The sunlight at the window did not go away. He looked at his watch. It read eight o'clock.

In the morning?

He struggled up, felt sick, held on to a chair for a moment, and then swayed to the window. It was full morning. He had been out all night!

He opened the window and sucked deep draughts of air. The thick, wooly haze cleared from his brain and eyes, if not from his mouth. He went back to the kitchen. There was no coffee, but the bottle of bourbon was there. He took a sniff, his stomach turned, but steadied. He poured a stiff shot, drank it down in a gulp, and went back into the living room and sat down.

In a moment the whisky would work. Meanwhile, it was time to think. Phillips had drugged him. For almost twelve hours. Was that

an accident, or had Phillips wanted twelve hours. He began to remember the way the real estate man had talked, the lost look on Carol Phillips's face.

Phillips had wanted time. Time to marry Marcia? That was how it had sounded, but it didn't make sense. Unless he wanted to get her away from Burrows, marry her before something happened to stop him!

Shayne remembered his feeling of a strangeness about the way Phillips was talking last night. Crazy, unreal, as if he did not believe what he was saying. Or as if he believed it, but it was only a brief dream.

Shayne swore to himself. The whisky had worked, giving him the energy he needed. He had missed the obvious all along. They had all gone to room 47, by their own admission, except Phillips. Yet Phillips had more reason to protect Marcia than anyone.

The man the witness had seen had looked like Shayne. Only Phillips really fitted that description if you forgot the red hair. Maybe Dr. Burrows, too, in a dark corridor, but Phillips the most likely.

And Phillips had needed twelve hours to do something and get away. Shayne was sure of it. There was no proof against the man. Unless—

Shayne headed for the door. He had the simple answer. Phillips

had nothing against him, unless his wife, Carol Phillips, broke his alibi now that she knew he was leaving her! Phillips had not been at home, and Carol knew it. Maybe she even knew where he had been!

Shayne found Lucy's car where he had left it and drove straight to his office. Lucy was not in yet. He took his desk gun, suspended license or no, and went back down. He drove straight to the garish headquarters of Dr. Burrows. He had no doubt that Phillips had gone there to have it out over Marcia.

As he drove around the side of the buildings to the rear and Dr. Burrows's residence with its lawn, pool and tennis court, he saw a car parked off the drive some fifty yards among a thick growth of trees on the grounds.

It was Merton Phillips's compact.

Shayne parked and approached the car warily, his automatic ready. There was no sign of life around the car. Shayne scowled. Phillips should have been long gone, unless there had been some more trouble.

There had been.

As Shayne reached the car he saw the man in it. Even before he opened the door he knew that the man was dead. No one's head rested at that angle against the back of the front seat who was alive.

He opened the door and looked at Merton Phillips.

The real estate man had been shot once in the heart. The wound looked like the same small caliber gun, and there were powder burns. Whoever had killed Phillips had sat close to him in the car and pressed the gun directly against his heart. Someone who had been in the driver's seat.

Phillips was already cold and stiff. He had been dead for many hours. The keys were gone from the ignition, and the engine was cold.

Shayne found the gun itself there on the floor of the car. But it had not been suicide.

It was the same gun Phillips had had in the apartment, but the man had not shot himself. Not the way he was lying, and from the location of the gun. Shayne was sure of it, but a paraffin test would tell. He had a hunch that whoever had done it had tried to make it look like suicide but had not been very expert, and probably in a hurry.

The redhead got back out of the car and looked around. The car had been driven from the driveway, in the dark it had been hidden from the house and drive. Shayne did not think that Phillips had driven himself to meet his killer.

No, he had been killed somewhere else, probably in the house or in the driveway, and his car

and body driven to the trees by the killer.

Shayne went back to his car and drove on to the door of the house. In the downstairs study voices were raised in angry argument. Shayne rang. The voices did not stop. The door was opened by the same old woman.

"You again?" she said.

"I want to see Burrows."

"He's not seeing anyone unless you have a warrant."

"I've got my own warrant," Shayne snapped.

He pushed the woman out of the way, not too gently, and strode into the study. Dr. Ed Burrows sat on a chaise lounge, arguing furiously with a tall, thin man Shayne had not seen before. But an open black bag made it clear that the stranger was a doctor. When the two men saw Shayne they stopped talking. Burrows tried to get up.

"What the devil do you—"

"Your little frame won't work," Shayne snapped. "I found the picture. I know the story."

"You found it but you don't have—" Burrows stopped short.

Shayne grinned. "So you got it from me, good. That gives me a charge against you. I'll find your car damaged, right?"

"Go to hell," Burrows said.

The doctor said, "I don't know who you are, but Dr. Burrows needs rest. A—"

"Shut up, Doc," Burrows said.

"I will not!" the doctor said. "My patient has been shot. He needs to rest."

"Shot?" Shayne said. "Before or after he killed Merton Phillips?"

XV

FOR A LONG moment no one moved in the room. The medical man blinked at Mike Shayne, then at Burrows. The evangelist came half off his chaise lounge again.

"Killed? Phillips? No! You're lying!"

Shayne saw that the evangelist had been hit in the left leg. It did not look like a bad wound. Shayne tugged slowly on his left ear. Where were the police?

"Tell me how you got shot, Burrows," Shayne said.

Burrows waved his massive arms. "He came out here last night, after we'd battled in that damned apartment. Both of them came, that married fool and Marcia. They said they were going off together, and were going to be married as soon as his divorce came through. He was going to get a Mexican divorce at once."

"What did you do? Pull a gun?"

"Yes, I did! He'd pulled one on me earlier. He just laughed. He said shooting him would really finish my reputation. He said if I didn't let them go, give my permission, he'd give the story of their affair to the papers. He'd



drag it all out, including Rex Calin."

"He had you good," Shayne said drily. "Your daughter or your lucrative reputation."

"I lost my head, I guess, and I hit him. I was going after him to break his neck when he shot me!"

"You didn't call the police?"

"No."

"Why not?"

Burrows lay back on the chaise longue. His face was set in a stubborn mask, but there was pain behind his eyes. The medical man was standing there in total confusion. Shayne guessed that Burrows had given him some story of shooting himself by accident.

"Why not the police, Burrows?" Shayne said.

Burrows moved his head from

side to side as if trying to escape from some torment.

"Because Marcia went with him!"

"Last night? Right when he left here?"

"No, not then. She left about an hour later. She was going to meet him. Where—where was he killed?"

"You're sure she didn't leave with him?"

"Yes. She went to the door, but she came back to stay with me until the doctor came. Then she left."

"Was he to pick her up? Waiting outside, maybe?"

"I don't know. Where was he killed, Shayne? When?"

"Never mind that now. Tell me all about Rex Calin, the whole story and make it good this time."

Burrows sat up again. He snarled at the doctor. "Okay, you can get out. I'm okay."

The doctor closed his bag. "I'll have to report this to the police now, Ed. You lied to me."

"Everyone lies," Burrows said. "Report it and be damned."

The doctor left stiffly, his face contorted with outrage. Burrows moodily watched him go. Then he looked at Shayne.

"Okay, you must know most of it by now. When that Rex Calin got in touch and put on his squeeze I tried to hire you. You made me pretty mad. I'd picked up one of your cards. When you wouldn't

take the job, I had to go myself. I got there early. I watched for a time and saw Marcia go in. I didn't know what to make of that, so I went in and started up.

"When I got to the floor I saw Marcia come out. She looked terrible. She saw me. I took her back downstairs. She said she'd gone to try to stop Calin. I was scared, believe me, Shayne. I couldn't ask her, but I did—had she done anything? She said no. I believed her. I sent her home, and went back up."

"So that's why she lied about it. She saw you go up when Calin was still alive. She was protecting you."

"I guess I haven't been much of a father, but she does love me if she doesn't like me. I don't deserve it. Anyway, I went back up. I'd been with Marcia about ten minutes all in all. When I got to the floor the door was open to room forty-seven. I went in. No one was there. Then someone hit me from behind, and I went out."

Shayne tugged at his ear. "You went up, met Marcia coming out of room forty-seven, went down with her, and then ten minutes later went back up, found no one there, and got hit?"

"Yes."

"So you thought maybe Marcia had come back again?"

"Yes, later, after I came to."

"When was that?"

"I'm not sure. I know I came

to in another room. It was down the hall. An empty room, I guess. I was groggy. I doused my head and then went back along the hall. I heard someone running away. I went into room forty-seven and Calin was there—dead."

Burrows mopped at his face. "I was scared. That's when I thought Marcia had come back. Whoever it was running away had been small."

"Al Banda," I said. "Everyone was there. Banda said he found Calin dead, too."

"I didn't know who it was, but someone small. I didn't know what to do. I looked around for whatever evidence Calin might have had, but I couldn't find it. So I thought about you. If Marcia had killed him, I wanted to frame someone. If she hadn't, I wanted you in it to find out who had."

"Risky," Shayne said.

"I had to risk it. The blackmail material could show up at any time. That would point straight to Marcia or me. So I wrote on the back and left the card. Then I went out."

"What time was this?"

"About ten after eleven, maybe a few minutes later."

"You're sure? Not eleven-fifteen?"

"No, I'm sure of that. It was eleven-fifteen exactly when I got back to my car. I looked at my watch, I know."

Shayne swore softly. "Then you were a lucky man, because it's almost certain the killer was still in the apartment, or around somewhere in the corridor."

"You're sure?"

"Yeah. He was seen about eleven-fifteen. So it adds up to Marcia there first. She says she left him alive. Then you, and you were hit and didn't see Calin at all. Then Al Banda, who says Calin was dead. So Calin was killed sometime between when Marcia left, if she's telling the truth, and when you came back from the other room."

Burrows shook his massive head. "All right, but what can you get from that?"

"A killer, I think. Only you and Marcia knew exactly where you were going to meet Calin and when. Al Banda says she told him. But he got there late, so maybe she didn't tell him the exact time—or maybe she made sure she got there first."

"You're implying that she killed him? That she wanted to try to frame Al Banda?"

"Maybe. Did you tell anyone?"

"No. Just you. Not even Marcia."

"So it all comes down to Marcia, and she was the first one there."

"Shayne, no! Listen, if Marcia—"

"Forget whatever you were going to say," Shayne snapped.

The redhead turned for the door. "I'll be back."

He went out. He drove to the first public telephone and called Will Gentry. He reported the killing of Phillips. Then he talked for a few more minutes, and when he hung up he went back to his car.

He was sure now who had killed Rex Calin, and why. And he was sure who had killed Merton Phillips—and why.

XVI

THE SMALL TRACT house was as silent as a tomb. One car stood in the garage that had been designed for two. It was a large, black Lincoln.

Mike Shayne went up to the door of the house. Out of the corner of his eye he saw the small sportscar park just up the block and sit there. He was being followed. The redhead was not surprised.

Carol Phillips answered the door. She stared at him. "Yes?"

Her elegant face was drawn and tired. Her fine body was hidden in a loose robe. Even now, alone in an empty house, she seemed to be groomed all the way to look her most exciting—to other men. And there was a strange calmness about her, a flash in her tired eyes.

"Can I come in, Mrs. Phillips?"

"Certainly, but I'm awfully

tired. I didn't sleep very well. I'm not used to being alone."

"Where is Merton?" Shayne said.

She shrugged, and turned to lead him into the same living room. Shayne was aware this time of its immaculateness, its perfection. Like a room in a museum that has never been lived in—a room waiting for someone to come alive in it.

"Merton isn't here?" Shayne said.

"He left, Mr. Shayne," Carol Phillips said. She sat down and arranged herself so that her legs and hips showed their best, smiling at him suddenly as if to ask for his approval of the effect.

"He left you, you mean?"

"Yes. He said he was getting a Mexican divorce to marry that— that Marcia. He won't though. He's too weak for that."

"Is he weak, Mrs. Phillips?"

"Very. He never had any strength in him. I know that. He could never do anything strong or violent or even on his own."

"Then you're glad to be rid of him?"

"Glad?" she said. "Why, yes, of course."

"Except there is the money? I mean, he makes a good income, and he has his inheritance."

"It won't be easy, but I'll manage."

"After all these years? You don't mind that he leaves you

high and dry for another woman? You have no children. If he runs to Mexico, you won't have a dime. He'll lose his job."

"I don't mind, not now."

"What do you mind, Mrs. Phillips? That he's doing it? That he's not weak any more? He's leaving you, marrying a young girl against her father? Is that what you hated? That he's going to break your hold, become a man, maybe?"

She stared at him from where she sat, and slowly she pulled her robe closer around her. She pulled it, huddled, until she sat all covered and curled and in a cocoon. She looked almost ugly, tied in knots, hidden.

"I don't know what you mean!" she said, the calmness of her eyes suddenly wary.

"That's it, isn't it? You know he's broken your dominance. Even if he came back you wouldn't rule him any more. You wouldn't have the money to do as you pleased, to make a slave of him."

She said, "Get out!"

"You said he'd never do anything, but he has, hasn't he?" Shayne said, pushing at her. "He's run away. But he did something more, a positive act that needed guts. You know he killed Rex Calin, don't you?"

For a long time she said nothing. She just sat there and looked at Shayne, then at something in the far distance behind Shayne.

Something, again, that only she could see. Shayne heard the soft footsteps outside at the windows. Carol Phillips did not hear them. She heard nothing that wasn't inside her own head.

"Yes," she said at last, "he killed that man. He wasn't home. He came home near midnight. There was blood on his suit. He explained it, but later, after you were here, I knew. I saw the pistol. He killed that man! He shot him!"

"And he told you, didn't he? He stood here and told you he had killed a man, that it was all over between you even if he wasn't caught. He was going to marry Marcia. He expected he would be caught sooner or later, but he was going to marry Marcia, do that for her, and live as long as he could."

"Yes," she snarled, "he told me that! Me! Oh, he was so proud of himself for killing that man!"

"Yes," Shayne said, "and now he's dead. Someone killed him, Mrs. Phillips. You tell me who killed him. Or would you rather I tell you?"

Her mouth opened but no sound came out. Shayne heard the cry from the next room. Marcia Burrows came in, her hand over her mouth and the small pistol in the other hand. The same pistol Shayne had taken from Banda and given back to her in his office.

"Dead? Mert is dead!" Marcia whispered.

Banda stood behind her in the doorway from the next room.

XVII

MIKE SHAYNE moved swiftly. He had the gun, and spun the pretty girl into Banda before the small youth could move. The red-head waved the pistol.

"Inside, both of you! Now!"

Banda hesitated, then slowly took Marcia Burrows's arm and went into the living room. Carol Phillips looked at the pretty girl but there was no anger or hate in her eyes. She went to the girl and began to comfort her.

The older woman crooned softly to the girl. "It's a terrible thing, my dear, I know. But think that poor Merton would soon have been caught for his crime. It's better that you saved him that suffering."

Marcia stepped away and her soft girl's eyes were puzzled as she watched Carol Phillips. Al Banda stood like a hawk ready to pounce.

Carol Phillips looked at Shayne.

"I'm sure the girl had to shoot him, Mr. Shayne. Self-defense. He was a murderer. A good lawyer should be able to take care of it."

Her voice was suddenly crisp again, efficient, in full control.

"Did I say he was shot?" Shayne said. "I don't remember saying that."

Her eyes flickered. "Of course you did."

"No, I didn't, and Marcia didn't kill him. Unless I'm wrong, she's looking for him. She came here to find him when he didn't meet her where he was supposed to last night."

Marcia Burrows nodded. "He never came. I waited for hours. This morning Al came and we drove here."

"Of course," Carol Phillips said. "He must have shot himself. He had killed that Calin man. Yes, suicide. That would be like Merton."

"No," Shayne said. "He didn't kill himself, and I never said he had been shot. You weren't worried about him leaving you without money, were you, Mrs. Phillips? You had no reason to be. You know he's dead and you get his money."

"If he's dead I certainly do," Carol Phillips snapped.

"Not if you killed him, Mrs. Phillips. That's what you did, didn't you? You followed him last night. You heard what he said to Ed Burrows, and you knew you'd lost him for good. So you waited outside, stopped him as he drove down the driveway, and you shot him with his own gun."

"How would I do that? He's rather bigger than I am."

"Who knows? Probably you made him think you wanted to help him. You told him you'd get

rid of the gun for him. I'd figure you had a hundred ways. It doesn't matter. You got the gun and you shot him."

"For the money, I suppose?" she said. "Isn't that a bit ridiculous, Mr. Shayne? I mean, Merton had killed a man. All I had to do was turn him in."

"The money was only a little part," Shayne said, "and you couldn't be certain he'd be convicted. There isn't any real evidence against him. Anyway, none of that was why you killed him. Except that because he was a murderer you figured you could plead self-defense if worst came to worst. Besides, you have to be a little insane, too."

"Really?" Carol said coldly.

"It cracked you, what was happening. For what you had to do just turning him in wouldn't have helped. You had to kill him yourself—he had to *know*!"

"And why was that, Mr. Shayne?" Carol said softly.

"Because he was free, Mrs. Phillips. He was proud of having killed Rex Calin. He had acted, done it. That was what you couldn't accept, couldn't allow. His act committed an act of strength, of courage, no matter how wrong. Your dominance was over."

"That was the blow you couldn't stand, that cracked you wide open—he had finally acted, risked his whole life, and not for you, but for a young woman who was

all you could never be!"

"So I risked my life by killing him when the police would have done it for me? Ridiculous!"

Shayne shook his head. "No, the police wouldn't have done, Mrs. Phillips. You had to prove to him that you were still the strong one; that you were the power, not him. You couldn't let him have the chance of getting away with it and marrying Marcia, not even for a little while. So you shot him. I never said he had been shot, but you knew. You're about the only one who could have gotten that close to him."

A scornful twist came to Carol Phillips's lips. "You'll never prove it, Shayne."

Shayne called out, "Will! Come in."

Will Gentry and two of his men came into the room. Shayne walked across the room to where Mrs. Phillips's handbag stood on a table. He took the bag, unopened, and handed it to Gentry.

"Open it, Will, in front of witnesses. Take out the keys."

Gentry opened the bag and took out the keys. There were two sets of keys. Carol Phillips stared and went ashen.

"Two sets of keys," Shayne said. "The car keys in Merton's car were missing. You took them after you drove the car into those trees. Reflex. You were so used to driving the car that you just automatically took the keys with-

out, even realizing it. Only you had his keys. You killed him!"

Gentry looked at the woman. "A paraffin test should show she fired a gun. We'll get the rest."

For a long minute Carol Phillips was silent. Then she looked all around at all of them with burning, proud, half-crazy eyes.

"All right, but you'll never convict me! You don't have any witnesses. He was a killer! I shot in self-defense. We fought for the gun and it went off! I'll walk out free as a bird, and he'll be dead! I'll win! You hear? I'll win!"

Shayne nodded. "Maybe you will, but you won't have Phillips to rule any more. You've lost him, too."

The tall, dark woman gave a strangled cry and collapsed into a heap on the floor.

An hour later she was moaning, crying, laughing insanely. Will Gentry and Mike Shayne watched them take her out.

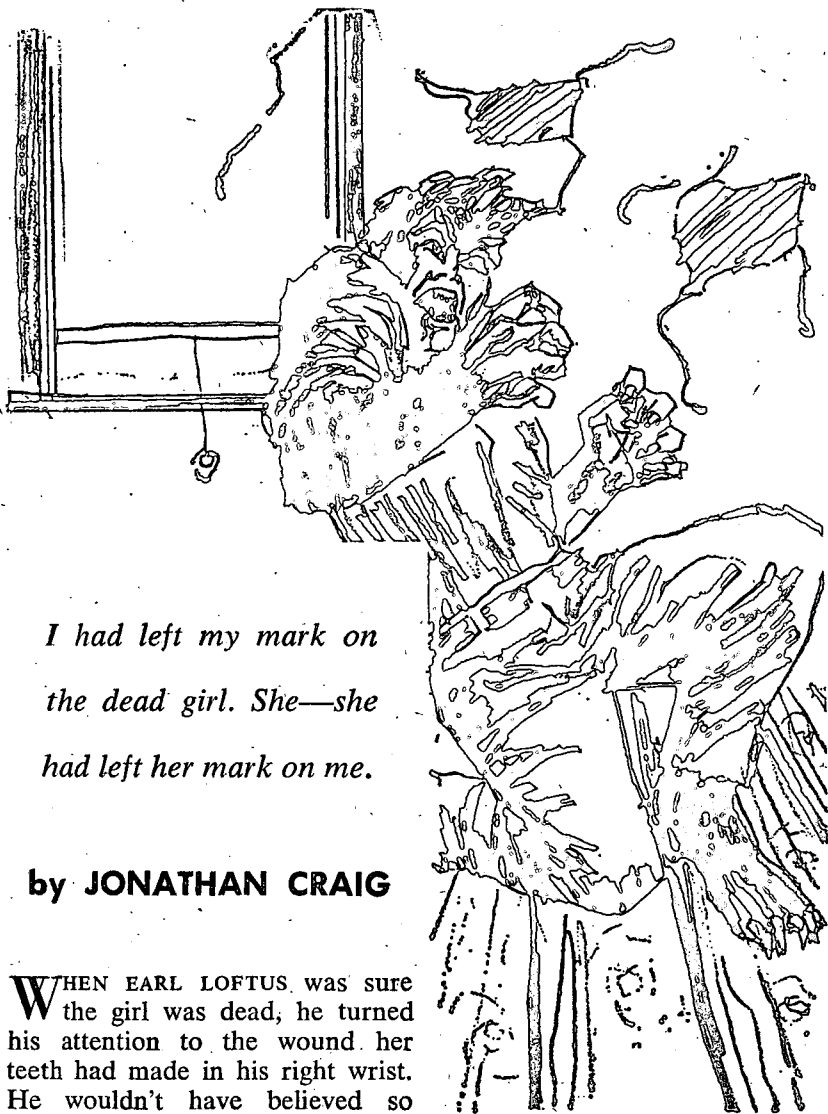
"She'll probably beat a jury, Mike," Gentry said. "She's right."

"She won't beat herself," Shayne said. "She had to have Phillips to rule, to dominate. She's cracked all the way now, Will."

"I guess maybe Phillips made it," Gentry said. "He's free now."

Mike Shayne nodded, and watched Marcia Burrows and Al Banda leave close together. It looked like Marcia was going to be free, too. Merton Phillips had done that much, anyway.

Just Before Midnight



*I had left my mark on
the dead girl. She—she
had left her mark on me.*

by **JONATHAN CRAIG**

WHEN EARL LOFTUS was sure the girl was dead, he turned his attention to the wound her teeth had made in his right wrist. He wouldn't have believed so

small a girl could put up such a fight. His whole body ached from the blows she had landed with knees and elbows, and her torn clothing was streaked with blood, all of it his own. There was a little blood on the right sleeve of his hospital orderly's white jacket too, but none at all on his trousers or shoes.

He looked both ways along the dark length of the alley that ran between the nurses' quarters and the hospital parking lot, listening intently—a tall young man with a thin face and pale gray eyes with a moist sheen close to tears.

There was nothing to see, nothing to hear. The hospital had a rule against nurses using the alley after dark, but the girl at his feet had made a practice of ignoring it.

Loftus took out his handkerchief, tied a hard knot in the middle of it, and bound it around his wrist with the knot just above the bite wound. The bleeding stopped.

Then he put on the overcoat he had removed while he stood hiding in the recessed doorway and smoothed back his hair carefully with the palms of both hands.

Without looking at the girl again, Loftus turned and walked without hurry in the direction of the hospital. As he walked, he glanced at the luminous dial of his wrist watch. He didn't go on duty until midnight; he had almost twenty minutes.

He skirted the outer edges of

the brightly-lit parking lot, keeping to the shadows, and entered the hospital by the side door nearest the men's locker room. He met no one in the hall, and the locker room was empty.

He hung his overcoat in his locker, changed to his spare orderly's jacket, and rolled the bloodied jacket into a tight wad which he stuffed into the waistband of his trousers, sucking in his breath to compensate for the bulge.

Next he went to the supply room that served the out-patient clinic, where he dusted his wound with antibiotic powder and bandaged it neatly with a narrow length of gauze. Then, from a bin of small orthopedic devices, he selected a leather wrist strap two and one-half inches wide and buckled it tightly over the gauze.

Five minutes later he had buried the soiled coat and handkerchief deep in the contents of one of the surgical waste cans awaiting incineration, signed the time sheet, and was going about his regular duties, just as he had done every work night for the last six months.

Loftus smiled to himself, thinking about the way it had been out there in the alley. The three other girls he had treated in the same way—the two brunettes in Philly and the blonde in Baltimore—had all been pretty, of course, but the one tonight had been the prettiest by far. An absolute beauty, any

way you looked at her, face and body both. She hadn't stayed pretty long, though, not after he'd started choking her.

A shame, in a way, he reflected. A waste, kind of. She'd have been smarter to give me a tumble. But no, not her. I wasn't good enough for her. She had her sights set on a doctor, no less. That double-dome piece of flab, Dr. Spencer. Not much to look at, maybe, but a big-money man just the same. Lots of money now, and lots more later on.

You should have obeyed the rules about that alley, honey, he thought. You'd be a lot less dead. And how about your boy friend, now? Your young Dr. Spencer, who coins all that loot? He's in for a real jolt, that man. It wouldn't surprise me one bit if he just plain comes all apart.

His wrist suddenly began to throb with pain, and he went to the locker room for some of the codeine he had cached there, along with other narcotics and amphetamines which he stole whenever he could and sold to a cut-rate druggist on West Embick Boulevard.

He was just leaving the room when he saw them wheeling the girl into Emergency Two. He was surprised they'd found her so soon; the chances of anyone else's being in that alley at this time of night were remote. Then he saw a uniformed policeman among the or-



derlies and nurses surrounding the stretcher cart, and reasoned that the cop had decided to inspect the alley and had come across her.

Dr. Spencer was up there too, he noticed, his face as white as his starched smock.

Loftus walked toward the emergency room, trying not to hurry. This ought to be a real kick, he thought. An extra added dividend, so to speak. He hadn't been lucky enough to be around when they'd brought in the other girls at Philadelphia and Baltimore, but this time the breaks were with him.

He tried to enter the emergency room, but Dr. Spencer was ordering everyone out, so he stood near the clump of nurses and orderlies and listened.

Poor Barbara Ives, they were saying. Poor little Barbara. How terrible. . . . Why, I was talking to her not more than an hour ago. . . . Such a wonderful girl. . . . I told her not to use that-alley. I told her a dozen times. . . . A

maniac loose out there . . . Poor Barbara.

None of the nurses or orderlies spoke to him or even acknowledged his presence. They'd never accepted him. Not once had any of them called him by his first name; it was always *Loftus* do this, or *Loftus* do that.

His wrist was beginning to swell. He left the group around the door of the emergency room, and as soon as he was out of sight loosened the wrist strap a little and re-buckled it.

Twenty minutes later Earl Loftus came upon Dr. Spencer, standing alone near the door of the doctors' lounge. He stopped beside the heavy-set, prematurely graying doctor and made his voice sound compassionate.

"I just heard what happened, Dr. Spencer," he said. "A terrible thing."

Spencer turned his head slightly toward him, but his eyes didn't meet Earl Loftus' and he said nothing.

"Hell of a thing to happen," Loftus said. "We all know how you felt about her, Doctor. I guess we all felt a little the same way ourselves. She was a wonderful girl."

The doctor's eyes came up slowly, drawn with pain and loss. "Yes," he said. "Yes, she was, Loftus."

"Prettiest girl I think I ever saw," Loftus said. "One of them,

anyhow. You don't see a girl that pretty very often, even in the movies."

The doctor looked away again.

"And that body," Earl Loftus said. "Spectacular. That girl was really put together."

Spencer glanced at him sharply, his eyes narrowed; then he turned away abruptly and walked off.

Earl Loftus smiled. Spencer could have him fired, he knew; there was even a good chance he would. But it had been worth it, just to see the look on the poor slob's face. I really got to him that time, he thought; I got to him real good.

He had been in a pleasant mood ever since he finished with the girl; now, after his exchange with the man she had planned to marry, he felt even better. He worked hard and steadily, humming softly to himself now and then, and the night passed swiftly.

It was mid-afternoon when Earl Loftus awoke the next day. He ate two of the stale jelly doughnuts he kept in his small furnished room on Herbert Street, shivered through a quick shave in the unheated bathroom down the hall, dressed, and caught the bus downtown.

Loftus was a loner, but not lonely, a man who had never had a friend and had never wanted one. He spent the rest of the afternoon and the entire evening in second-run movie houses—three

of them, sitting through all three of the double-feature programs. Then he walked to the hospital, had his free meal in the employees' cafeteria, and went to work.

Homicide detectives had questioned several members of the staff about the dead girl's background, he learned. There was a rumor that the police were holding a suspect at the precinct house. What a kick if the cops nailed somebody else for it, he thought.

And they just might do it, too, if they got desperate enough. *That* would be a situation with a lot of laughs in it, for sure.

Earl Loftus was in the cafeteria, having coffee on his two o'clock break, when Dr. Spencer and the fat man came in. They stood looking at him for a moment, while Spencer said something; then Spencer left and the fat man came over to the table.

The fat man had a bald, almost perfectly round head, and small, lashless eyes. He looked tired, and his nasal voice sounded uninterested.

"Are you Earl Loftus?" he asked.

"That's right," Loftus said. "What about it?"

"I'm Lieutenant Greer, Homicide," the fat man said, taking a folded sheet of paper from the inside pocket of his jacket. "I've got a warrant here for your arrest, Mr. Loftus."

"Arrest for what?"

"Suspicion of murder," Greer said.

Loftus laughed softly. "You've got to be kidding," he said.

"Sure," the fat man said. "Just kidding, Loftus. Now throw down the rest of that coffee and let's take a little ride."

"Who am I supposed to have killed?"

"Girl named Barbara Ives," Greer said. "Last night. And kill her isn't all you did." He gestured toward the wrist strap. "What're you hiding under there, Loftus? Chigger bite?"

"I cut my wrist on the door of my locker."

"Sure you did," Greer said. "Now if you'll just account for a witness or so and a few other small items, you'll have no problems."

"Witness?" Loftus said. "What witness?"

The lieutenant put the sheet of paper back in his pocket and tapped a thumbnail against the bulge beneath his left arm.

"You know what this is," he said. "So don't get any wrong ideas. Now let's—"

"I know my rights," Loftus said. "You can't question me unless I have a lawyer with me."

"Who's questioning you?" Greer said. "Now hoist yourself out of there and let's take that little ride."

Earl Loftus was booked at the precinct stationhouse, provided with a court-appointed attorney,

held at the city jail, and given a hearing before a magistrate. The magistrate ordered that Loftus be transferred to the county jail and held for the grand jury.

In the weeks that passed before his case was heard, Earl Loftus had only two visitors: his attorney, and Dr. Spencer. The lawyer never stayed more than a few minutes. Dr. Spencer came oftener and stayed longer, standing in the corridor outside Loftus's cell and staring through the bars at him as if he were staring into the cage of a wild beast. He never spoke. Loftus ignored him.

The grand jury heard Loftus's case on a cold gray Friday at the end of January. The assistant district attorney was young and abrasive and inept. He irritated the jurors by addressing them as an impatient teacher might address so many backward children.

His only witness—a nurse whose testimony he was depending on to place Earl Loftus at the scene of the murder—reversed herself under oath. She had, she said, had second thoughts. She was now by no means sure the man she had seen at the mouth of the alley had been Earl Loftus; in fact, she was almost certain it had not.

The laceration on Earl Loftus's wrist did not have the characteristic appearance of a bite wound, as the district attorney contended, and the jurors resented the district attorney's insistence that it did.

The fact that both Loftus's blood and the blood on the dead girl's clothing were type O-Positive—the most common blood type of all—impressed no one.

On another day, in another mood, with a different district attorney, the grand jury might have returned a true bill.

On this day, it did not. It found the evidence against Earl Loftus insufficient and refused to indict him.

Two hours later, shortly after noon, Loftus was released from custody. He went down the steps of the County Building, smiling to himself, the happiest he had ever been. It struck him with something close to awe that he had never before realized just how wonderful it was to be alive, and to know that he was going to stay that way.

Dr. Spencer, his gray hair stirring in the wintry breeze, was waiting for him at the foot of the stairway.

"Well, well," Earl Loftus said. "What a nice surprise. You come to congratulate me?"

"Not exactly," Spencer said. "You only *think* you've gotten away with that girl's murder, Loftus."

Earl Loftus laughed. "That so?" he said.

"Believe me, Loftus, you'll pay for what you did. You'll pay in a way that'll make you wish you'd never been born."

"Oh?" Loftus said. "And just

how is that going to come about, Doctor?"

"You're going to die one of the hardest deaths known to man," Spencer said. "You're doomed, Loftus, and it's too late now to do anything about it. I've known you were doomed ever since the day after you murdered Barbara."

"What're you talking about? Or do you know yourself?"

"The pathologist did a very thorough autopsy on her," Spencer said. "I read his report. It was extremely interesting."

"Make sense, Spencer. What're you trying to say?"

"I hadn't known about it," Spencer said, "but one of her girl friends said that one day while they were sitting in the park, a

few weeks before you killed her, a squirrel bit Barbara on the finger."

The doctor paused, smiling in a way that made Loftus's blood run cold. "Just a tiny puncture, you know. Not nearly so big as that scar you have on your right wrist, Loftus."

"Never mind the scar, damn you," Loftus said. "What're you driving at?"

"The law won't let me shoot you down like the mad dog you are," Spencer said. "But there's no law against my letting you die like one."

Earl Loftus felt his knees begin to sag. "My God . . ." he said.

"That's right, Loftus," Spencer said, his smile widening. "Barbara Ives had rabies."

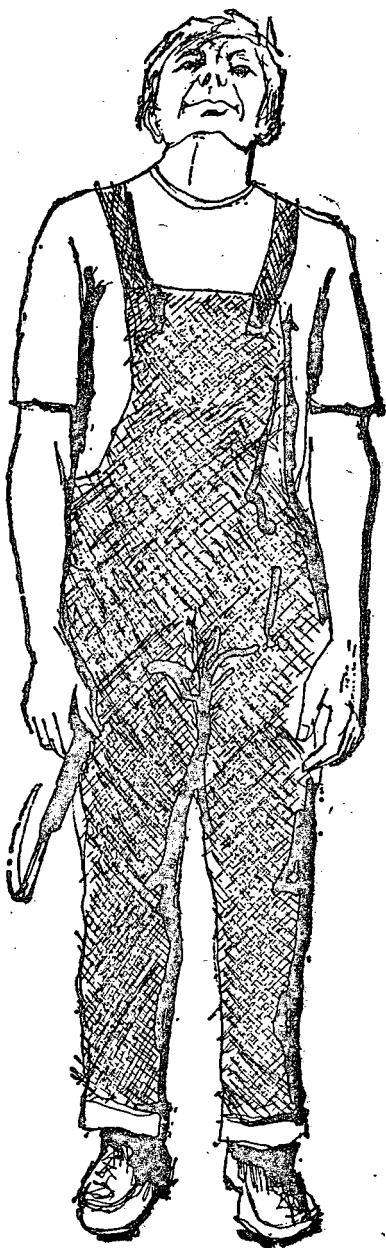
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THE DUMMY

by CLAYTON MATTHEWS

*He couldn't speak nor hear
—except the voice of Death.*

THE AMUSEMENTS in our little East Texas town were few. The depression had closed the Majestic movie house, Conroe County was dry as a bone, and there was a dance maybe once a month. Our high school didn't have enough players to field a football team, and the only person in our town who'd ever seen a big league baseball game was Sheriff Jason Little, who'd made a trip to St. Louis one summer.

That left softball. We had a knock-together softball team that played every Sunday, either on the field back of the high school or traveling to one of the neighboring towns.

It was at one of those Sunday afternoon games that I first saw the Dummy. His name was Cass Walker, and he was the best softball player I ever saw, then or since. He was deaf and dumb, couldn't read or write. He used an elementary sign language that only

those who knew him well could understand.

But, as Sheriff Jason said, "When that old boy winds up and lets the ball go, he doesn't need to talk. The ball does all the talking for him."

Cass used what was called the windmill windup, his arm performing a great arc, his knuckles almost scraping the ground as his hand swooped down and up in the underhand delivery.

Cass had one basic pitch, his fast ball. It was all he needed. The ball was a blur when it crossed the plate. It was nothing unusual for him to strike out ten, twelve men a game.

He was a strong batter as well, usually good for at least a couple of runs a game. And he never seemed to tire, his fast ball having as much zip in the last inning as the first.

I was too young to play on the team, being only fifteen, but I was at the field every Sunday the team was home. Every man on the team worked a six-day week and couldn't practice during the week, so they all showed up Sunday morning and got in what practice they could before the game began.

I showed up early, too, carrying a lunch Aunt Beth had put in a paper sack for me.

She hadn't been in favor of it. "I don't think Kyle should be out there every Sunday, Jason, missing his dinner that way."

"Won't hurt him none, sis. A boy that age needs a little hero worship to help him grow up."

She sent a sidelong glance my way and lowered her voice. "I don't know as he should be tagging after a man like that. Nobody ever heard of him before or even knows where he comes from. He just showed up one day, just like that. And there's talk going around about him, like maybe he's in trouble with the law somewhere."

Sheriff Jason snorted. "Talk! Since when didn't folks talk?"

Aunt Beth wasn't my real aunt. I wasn't related to either of them. Sheriff Jason and his sister, who kept house for him, had taken me in to raise after my mother died.

And Sheriff Jason was only a deputy. He didn't even have an office. Almost every afternoon on my way out of town from school I could see him sitting on an up-ended pop box at the Texaco station, pipe fuming, a group of men clustered around him. Mostly talking about baseball.

I'd heard stories that he'd been appointed deputy as a sort of joke, but his solving a couple of crimes recently had changed all that. Now there was even talk of running him for sheriff.

Actually most of his job had little to do with crime. As he put it himself, "... most problems around here, disputes and things like that, don't need any law to handle. All that's needed is a little

talking, a little common horse sense."

Cass Walker came to our town with little more than the clothes he was wearing. He went to work on Tom Carter's hay baling crew.

I'd watched them baling hay down on the river bottom one afternoon. Cass rode the hay wagon, stacking the bales as they came from the baler, the curved hay hook flashing in the sun like a polished knife blade. Some crews needed two men on the wagon.

Cass handled it alone, his shirt off, those broad shoulders moving rhythmically as he bent, sunk the hook into a bale and heaved it onto the wagon as though it weighed no more than a sack of flour.

His skin was dark as an Indian's from the sun, his blond hair bleached almost white. His flat, expressionless face even looked like an Indian's. Yet there were times when he smiled in simple delight at something, strong white teeth flashing, a sound like a gurgle coming from him.

I first heard that gurgle one Sunday morning during practice. I was sitting off to one side, arms hugging my knees. Most of the players were going through batting practice, all except Cass and Walter Bradnell.

Bradnell was the catcher, a burly scowling man, hairy as an ape. He was the oldest man on the team, about thirty, and had a

small farm outside of town. His wife had left him to run away with a drummer some years back. Since then he had lived alone. He had threatened to quit when Cass joined the team.

"I won't catch for a dummy that can't talk to me," he'd growled. "He can't even read my signals."

Yet he'd kept playing when he found out how good Cass was. I guess it was about all the fun he got out of life, though you wouldn't think so the way he grumped around.

After a half hour's catching on this particular Sunday morning, Bradnell straightened up from his crouch to announce, "I need a cold drink."

Cass stared at him, hands on hips.

"What's the use? Might as well try and talk to a lamp post." Bradnell threw the ball down in disgust and stalked off toward the pop cooler.

The ball rolled across the ground toward me. I scooped it up and jumped to my feet. I saw Cass looking at me. I did a clumsy imitation of his windup and let the ball go. He had to jump about two feet off the ground to keep it from sailing over his head.

He made some gestures with his hands in front of his chest. They had no meaning for me. He beckoned me over to him.

When I stood before him he

took my hand, turned one of his over and placed mine in it. His hand was almost twice the size of mine.

And that was the first time I heard the gurgling sound coming from him. I looked up into his face. His pale blue eyes had a merry twinkle, and his mouth was open, emitting the gurgling laughter.

He put the softball into my hand and folded my fingers around it. They didn't reach halfway around. He touched my shoulder and again I glanced up at him.

He made an underhanded pitching motion with his right hand. I nodded eagerly.

He showed me how to hold the ball and how to wind up. As I strove to imitate him, Cass stood to one side, studying me closely.

Then he backed up a few feet, about half the regulation distance, and dropped down into a catcher's crouch. He pounded a fist into his palm. I wound up and threw. If there had been a plate, I would have missed it by at least a full yard.

But after a half dozen pitches, I began to get the hang of it, Cass grinning encouragement all the while and pounding his hands together.

"Boy, we came out here early to practice. We've got no time to be messing around with you." Bradnell snatched the ball from me

with a snarl. "Blast kids, anyway! Always underfoot! All ought to be chained up until they're full grown!"

Cass surged to his feet in one smooth motion, taking a step toward us. Then he stopped, his hands coming up automatically to catch the ball as Bradnell tossed it to him.

Every Sunday after that Cass found a half hour or so to spend with me. He showed me all the different pitches and tried to teach me how to bat. He had the patience of Job, always grinning, that gurgling laughter coming from him whenever I did anything that pleased him. Which wasn't as often, I'm sure, as he made out.

Even when I got a little more accurate and put everything I had into it, the ball still floated up to him with all the speed of a pillow.

All the while Bradnell scowled and complained. "Blasted kid and the Dummy! Two of a kind!"

While the other ball players weren't so openly antagonistic as Bradnell, none were especially friendly to Cass. When he—which was rare—cost the team a run, they would turn away in disgust.

On the other hand, when he struck out the side or batted in a run, they maintained a grim silence, never gathering around to clap him on the shoulder as they did when one of the other players made an outstanding play.

I asked Sheriff Jason about this



one Sunday as we sat together watching a game.

"Well . . ." He sighed, squirmed uncomfortably and puffed on his pipe. "It's a little hard to explain, Kyle. He's, he's different, you see, not being able to speak or hear. Folks tend to shy away from those different from themselves. They don't understand how he can be some other way they're not."

"But he's the best player on the team!"

"And that makes it worse, don't you see? No, I reckon you don't." He sighed again. "It's like—Ain't there some boy in school the rest of you makes fun of? There was when I was going to school. An old boy so freckled he looked like he'd been left out in the sun to rust. Every time it rained we told him not to get wet or he'd rust away to nothing. He was on the track team and could run faster than a jackrabbit. Everytime he won a race, we said he was trying to run the freckles off."

I was silent. There was such a boy. Roy Worth. He stuttered.

And he was the best pupil in my class. When a teacher asked a question his was always the first hand up. And he never stuttered in class. It was only when he was with us on the playground, with some of us hooting at him, that his tongue got tied in knots. And I was as, bad as the rest.

Sheriff Jason dropped a hand on my shoulder. "You like Cass, don't you, Kyle?"

I nodded mutely.

"Well, you hold onto that, boy. Don't let anybody talk you out of it. Who knows?" He chuckled. "He might even make a pitcher out of you!"

I don't think Cass could ever have done that, but he continued to work with me with untiring patience. In time, we were able to communicate after a fashion. No matter how many times I repeated the same stupid mistake, he never once lost his temper with me. And when I did do something halfway right, he'd grin, clap me on the shoulder and make the gurgling sound, and I'd feel ten feet tall.

Then it happened, exploding with a violence that almost ripped our town apart.

The haying season was coming to an end. All the big farms were done. On a Monday morning, Carter's hay baling crew moved to Bradnell's little river bottom farm.

On that Monday afternoon Sheriff Jason was already at home when I got in from school. He said

he was coming down with a cold. Aunt Beth was at the stove starting an early supper, Sheriff Jason was at the kitchen table nodding over the paper, and I was across from him, buried in a pulp detective magazine hidden behind a propped-up history book, when there was a knock on the kitchen door.

Aunt Beth started toward it, but it burst open before she got there, and a man charged in, pushing past her.

It was the man who ran the Texaco station. His face was swollen with excitement. "Jason, you're needed down to Walt Bradnell's hay field! They just found Bob Calder's boy, Ted; dead under a pile of hay!"

Sheriff Jason sat up, blinking. "What happened?"

"We ain't sure, but his neck's been broken. We think maybe the Dummy—You'd better come!"

Sheriff Jason got to his feet. "I reckon I'd better."

I started around the table. "Cass? Cass wouldn't—I'm coming along!"

Aunt Beth rushed at me. "No, Kyle, you stay here."

"Yes, boy, I guess you'd better—" Sheriff Jason's voice trailed off as he looked down into my face, his eyes squinted in thought. "On the other hand, maybe it wouldn't hurt, you coming along."

"Wouldn't hurt!" Aunt Beth's fingers dug into my arm. "It's not

something a boy his age should be seeing!"

"I think maybe I might need him, sis."

Aunt Beth was scandalized. "Need him? Land's sake, what for?"

Sheriff Jason jerked his head. "Come on along, Kyle."

It was a tone of voice he hardly ever used, but it meant he didn't want any argument. Aunt Beth's fingers loosened and fell away, and I went along in Sheriff Jason's Model A to Walter Bradnell's river bottom farm.

They had Cass spread-eagled on the ground by the hay wagon, face down, a man holding onto each arm and leg.

"Oh, for—!" Sheriff Jason said in disgust. "He's not a hog ready for butchering! Let him up!"

One of the men holding Cass was Bradnell. "I don't think that's such a good idea, Jason. He gave us quite a tussle. He's pretty damned wild."

"You would be, too, in his place. Maybe he can't hear or talk, but he can smell. The whole lot of you stink of a lynching," Sheriff Jason said scathingly. "Now let him up."

They got off Cass, backing away warily. Cass lay still for a moment, then rolled over and got up on all fours. He did look wild, his hair disheveled, his eyes rolling madly. He got to his feet and backed up until he was against the hay wag-

on. The men formed a tight half circle in front of him.

Sheriff Jason asked, "Where's the boy?"

One of the men said, "Over here a ways, Jason."

He led Sheriff Jason away. Cass had finally located me. His eyes pleaded with me. I started to go to him. Bradnell blocked my way with his arm. "No, boy, don't get in the way. He's crazy enough to do nearly anything."

Sheriff Jason came back. He stood beside me, filling his pipe. He spoke as though talking to himself. "Boy's neck is broken, right enough. And there's a big lump on his jaw where it looks like somebody hit him. Probably with a fist." He raised his voice. "Anybody show Cass the body and ask him if he knew anything about it?"

"Who can ask the Dummy anything?"

"Seems to me you don't have much trouble asking when you all want him to pitch a game," Sheriff Jason said dryly.

"No need to ask anyway. Who else but the Dummy would do a thing like that?"

"That's what I'm trying to find out." Sheriff Jason glanced around the circle of faces. "Bob Calder— You here?"

A stooped man in faded overalls, long face frozen in grief, stepped forward.

His voice gentle, Sheriff Jason

asked, "When did you first miss the boy, Bob?"

"Didn't really miss him, Jason," the man said dully. "He went off to school this morning like always. First I knew, they come to tell me he was dead." The man's neck contorted in a spasm of grief. "'Pears like he never did get to school. I looked and found my old .22 was gone.

"I reckon he sneaked off with it this morning to play hooky and hunt squirrels on the river bottom. He did that sometimes. I whomped him and whomped him but I reckon it didn't do much good—"

"Anybody find the twenty-two?"

"Ain't nowhere to be found, Jason. We looked."

Sheriff Jason had his pipe going good now. He turned to me. "Think you can get anything out of Cass, Kyle?"

"I can try."

I started toward him. He had stood all the while with his back planted solidly against the hay wagon. I could almost feel his bewilderment. But he was calmer now, and his glance fastened on me trustingly as I approached. The trouble was, what little communication there had been between us had concerned softball.

When I finally managed to get across to him that there was a dead boy and he was suspected of doing it, Cass became very agitated. He held both hands up be-



fore his chest, the fingers flying furiously.

Without looking around I said, "All I can understand is no, no, no!"

A growl swept through the men like an angry wind.

"Course he'd say that."

"What else can he say?"

"Who knows how many others he may have killed before he came here?"

"He did it! He killed the boy!"

I looked around to see them moving in, the circle tightening as they drew closer. Then they halted abruptly, fear stiffening their faces like fast-drying shellac.

I glanced back at Cass. From somewhere he'd found a hay hook. The late afternoon sun glinted wickedly off the hook as he swung it back and forth before him. The men gave ground quickly.

Cass advanced until he was be-

side me. Without looking at me, he dropped a hand on my shoulder and gently urged me behind him. Then he continued on, the hook swinging back and forth, back and forth.

There was an old story I'd heard many times about two men who'd fought over a woman using hay hooks. When it was over both were dead, bellies ripped open as though a bear had been at them.

The men gave him plenty of room, opening a wide path for him. When he reached the edge of the group Cass broke and ran, heading toward the trees at the edge of the field fifty yards away.

"After him!"

Nobody moved.

"Shoot him, Jason!"

"Now you know I don't carry a gun," Sheriff Jason said.

"Some sheriff, don't even carry a gun," Bradnell snarled.

"I wouldn't shoot him even if I did carry one." Sheriff Jason knocked his pipe out on his shoe heel. "I have no reason to think Cass killed that boy. From the look of him he was killed some time this morning, before the hay-ing crew ever got here, killed and left under a pile of hay to be found later."

Bradnell's face darkened. "What're you trying to say, Jason?"

"I'm remembering how you don't like kids, Walt, how you don't like 'em on your land. I re-

call last fall you caught a bunch of 'em picking pecans. You chased them and one boy fell over a log and broke his leg. You feel the same way about squirrel shooting you do about pecan picking, Walt?"

"Picking! They were stealing!" Bradnell clamped his lips shut, his glance darting about.

Sheriff Jason held out his hand. "Let me see your hand, Walt."

"What for?" The man tried to back away, but he was hemmed in.

Sheriff Jason seized Bradnell's right hand and turned it over. The knuckles were skinned, scabbed over with dried blood.

"How'd that happen, Walt?"

Bradnell jerked his hand away and jammed it into his pants pocket. "I skinned it chopping wood!"

Sheriff Jason was shaking his head. "No, Walt. You skinned those knuckles on Ted's jawbone."

Bradnell looked around wildly, then tried to make a break. Two men seized him and held him. He struggled for a moment, then subsided, panting. "All right, all right! I hit the boy! But I didn't mean to . . . I caught him hunting squirrels and told him to get off my land. He laughed at me and said I'd have to catch him first.

"Well, I did catch him. And I hit him to teach him a lesson. He fell in a funny way, and I heard a sound like I'd stepped on a rotten branch. I threw the twenty-two

into the river. But I didn't mean to kill him!"

Sheriff Jason said, "Sure. Just like you didn't mean for Cass to take the blame."

"Nobody cares about the Dummy," Bradnell muttered. But his head was hanging, the words spoken into the ground.

Sheriff Jason gestured. "All right. Two of you take him over to the sheriff at the county seat." He named two men for the job. "And tell the undertaker to come for Ted."

Bradnell was taken away, and the others began drifting off.

"Wait a minute!" Sheriff Jason said sharply. "How about Cass out there? Just think what could happen to the first person he runs into with that hay hook in his hand. He thinks everybody is against him. You all saw to that. We're going to have to find him and get across to him that everything's all right now."

Shamefaced, they came back, refusing to look at one another.

Sheriff Jason issued orders in a crisp voice. "It'll be dark soon and no telling how far he's run by now. We'll be looking all night. Go home and get lanterns. We'll meet back here in a half hour and start out."

When we drove up in front of the house, Sheriff Jason parked the Model A without shutting off the motor. "You stay in the car, Kyle. That way I won't have to

argue with sis. I have a couple of things to pick up."

He came back in five minutes, carrying a lantern and something in a brown paper sack. Most of the men were back with lanterns by the time we got back to the hay field.

Sheriff Jason strung the men out in a line spaced about twenty feet apart. He remained in the middle. "If you spot Cass, don't do anything. Just yell out."

We moved into the woods where Cass had last been seen. We had no trouble following his trail. In his panic he had trampled bushes and run into trees, breaking off branches.

We kept moving slowly all night, Sheriff Jason calling a ten-minute half every hour.

Cass was found just after sun-up. A hail came down the line to the right. I stumbled after Sheriff Jason as he hurried that way. Cass was backed up against a large rock higher than his head, the men circled around him like a pack of hunting dogs.

"He was asleep, Jason. I reckon he ran and ran until he dropped. Don't know why he didn't hear us coming. Oh, I guess he wouldn't—"

Clothes torn, skin scratched and bloodied, face dirty and stubbled with a day-old beard, Cass glared

defiance at us. He still carried the hay hook. He held it chest high in both hands.

Sheriff Jason studied him for a long moment. Then he fumbled in the paper sack he'd been carrying all night and took out my old softball. He handed it to me. "Kyle?"

He didn't have to tell me what to do. I took the ball and moved forward a few steps and waited until I was sure Cass saw me. Then I wound up and let the ball go.

For a breathless moment I didn't think he even saw it. The ball was almost to him before he dropped the hay hook and grabbed it. And it was a good pitch, too, chest high and right over the plate.

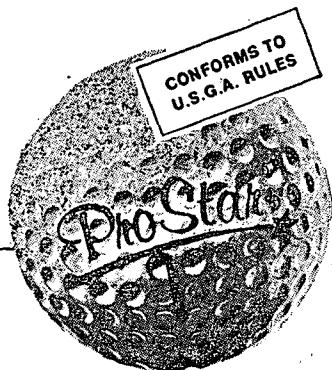
Then I was running toward him, babbling, "It's all right, Cass! Everything's all right!" My fingers were flying. I did everything I could to get through to him.

His eyes closed for a second or so, he swayed, and I reached out to steady him. Then his eyes opened, his hand came to rest on my shoulder, and he squeezed to let me know he understood.

But he didn't laugh. I never heard the gurgling laughter again. Nor did I ever see him pitch again.

Cass left town that very same day.

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Murder Is My Host

We faced each other across that narrow table. We were thinking the same thought. One of us would walk away rich. The other would die!

by JACK WEBB



I THOUGHT at first she was lost. She stood at the door of my office and sort of peeked inside, all legs and thin calves, and unkempt hair the color of dark honey sprawling about her shoulders.

"Are you Mr. Jacobs?"

I nodded.

She came in then, carrying an over-size purse with bits of bright color applied on the side, much in the manner a teen-ager who wished she were in the cafeteria-line set might carry a paper sack lunch.

I closed the Riggins folder and assumed my most fatherly manner. "What can I do for you, Miss?"

"You are the divorce detective?"

"I've been called that," I admitted.

She hesitated beside the chair beyond my desk. "But you look so nice."

"Thank you," I said kindly. She looked like one to get rid of fast. "Perhaps that's why I'm so expensive," I suggested.

"Bill says you're very good. May I sit down?"

"Of course. Bill who?"

The woolen skirt with a belt pushing down over the hips didn't half cover her thighs when she sat. "Bill Blake, my attorney."

"Horner, Blake and Kinney?"

"That's right." She crossed her legs. It gave me a pretty fair idea of how little otherwise was under that not enough of glen plaid.

"You are here about a divorce?"

"That's right."

"And Bill Blake recommended me?"

Featuring

THE DIVORCE DETECTIVE



"That's right," she said.

"All right, Mrs.—"

"Hutchner. Cindy Hutchner."

I pulled a pad from my top drawer and wrote her name. "As Mr. Blake no doubt told you, Mrs. Hutchner, most divorce cases here in California do not require a detective. The simple fact that you have come leads me to presume that you and Mr. Blake feel your case would benefit by verified proof of indiscretions on the part of your husband, the kind that'll stand up in court."

"That's right."

"Are these indiscretions in the nature of sexual liaisons?"

"You could sure call them that."

At least I could stop doodling ditto marks.

"Your husband's given names, Mrs. Hutchner."

"Robert Alexander. Generally he's called Alex."

"Occupation?"

"Physicist."

I stared at what I had written and then I stared at Cindy Hutchner, including those long, tan, little girl legs. "The Dr. Alex Hutchner?"

"That's right."

The phone rang and I was grateful.

"Excuse me," I said to Mrs. Hutchner. "Jacobs," I said to the phone.

"Has Cindy Hutchner been there, Jake?"

"Now," I said.

"Look. Postpone things until tomorrow morning, nine, my office. I think it's safest. Meanwhile I'll buy you lunch. Erasmus Club in twenty minutes."

"Thanks for the recommendation," I said.

Blake laughed at me. "It's a pot full of money, Jake. But you probably will have to face a fair amount of muscle."

"I have before."

"This time it can be pretty official. One thing Washington doesn't want right now is dirty wash on Hutchner's line. Not after the blowup in Tokyo last week."

"I'll convey your suggestion to Mrs. Hutchner," I said.

"Convey yourself over to the Erasmus."

I hung up on the poet.

"That was Mr. Blake," I said.

"He called to suggest that we would be wise to hold our first discussions in his office, tomorrow at nine. Is that convenient to you, Mrs. Hutchner?"

"Then you don't want to hear about Alex?" She sounded disappointed.

"Tomorrow," I said, "and with Mr. Blake. It may be rather important that he hears what you tell me."

"But I've told him."

"There's a difference," I assured her.

She stood up. Somehow, those long legs didn't look as skinny as

when she had come in. I took her to the door and watched her go down the hall. Her fanny wasn't quite as subdued as it might have been.

I clicked on the answer box to my phone, locked the outside door and scooted for the stairs. I reached the ground floor after she had emerged from the elevator but in time to see the guy in the public phone booth hang up the receiver and slip out the door after her.

When I saw, if you'll pardon the expression, that Mrs. Hutchner's tail wasn't crowding her, I turned the other direction and headed down Sixth toward the Erasmus Club. Before I reached the corner of Figueroa, another very professional and neat-appearing gent came up beside me:

"Mr. Jacobs," he said, "would you mind walking along with me?"

"As a matter of fact," I said, "I would."

He flipped open a leather folder and showed me his identification.

"I think an informal visit would be most advisable," he said.

"Right now," I said reasonably, "I have a date for lunch. It's business. I have to earn a living, too."

"Blake?"

I didn't say anything.

We paused at the curb. He was calculating things with that computer they all carry between their

ears. "Later this afternoon, Mr. Jacobs?"

"Probably wouldn't have anything to say then, either."

"We'll keep in touch as long as we have to," he said. He swung away from me in the direction from which we had come.

His parting shot was a hell of a remark. Nothing I could write J. Edgar or my congressman about. Just a hint that my detecting would be detected, that it wasn't my ball game and that the umpires might be prejudiced.

The poet had a corner booth in the grill. He had something good that looked like a drink setting in front of him and one arrived for me about thirty seconds after I sat down.

"Your generosity scares the hell out of me," I said.

"Maybe it should," Blake said, grinning without much humor. "We're about to light a fuse, Brother Jacobs."

"Perge," I said, "we already have."

We touched glasses, drank, and considered one and other. "What do you mean by that?" Blake asked.

"She's being tailed and I've been contacted with an invitation for an informal chat. Precisely, what in the devil's going on?"

"What do you know about Hutchner?"

"Just about what everybody does. He was literally spirited out



of Tokyo last week, as you said. Just in time to prevent massive student demonstrations after his tour of Southeastern Asia at the request of the Secretary of Defense. That a couple of years ago he was mentioned as a possible Nobel Prize winner. I certainly have no recollection of a Mrs. Cindy Hutchner and I have a pretty good memory for names and faces and anybody who goes around dressed like her."

We drank some more and the poet said, "Cindy's a friend of my sister's. They were room-mates for a couple of years at college."

"But Jan's almost thirty," I said.

"She is thirty," Blake said, "thirty-one actually, and so is Cindy Hutchner."

"Who are you trying to kid?"

"Cindy Hutchner's spent six of the last ten years in a sanatorium. Four of them before she met Hutchner, two since. I've got some splendid clinical evidence to prove he drove her back. Apparently

she turns into something of a vegetable when she's there. Really doesn't age like those of us in the rat race."

"If you've got all that, what do you need me for?"

"I don't want to go to court with Cindy Hutchner's illness; I want to go with Hutchner's sins. He's remarkably wealthy, by the way.

He signaled for another round.

"Isn't that rather unusual for these scientific types?"

"Hutchner's always been a loner. University work or private consultant, never industry. So, his patents are his own and he's got his thumb in a lot of pies, aviation, aerospace, nuclear power."

"Bully for us," I said, "but why are the feds butting in so fast? Divorces aren't that uncommon any more."

"This is a nasty one," Bill said. "If half of what Cindy's told me is true, it's going to curl some hairs. That's why I called you."

"Give me some samples," I suggested.

"Faroukian collection of hard core pornography. Some curious friends. A couple of parties, Cindy's been locked out of. Knocked out of really, and put to bed with a mickey."

"The last two leave me cold. Nothing we could take to court. I suppose I could take some photos of the dirty books and pictures. But you can do better than that,

pull the whole damned collection into court if you have to."

"I plan to," Bill said.

"Then where do I come in?"

"First, there's Mae Ling."

"Mae Ling?"

"Master's in biochemistry, working on her doctorate in one of Hutchner's fields. Working with him, in fact. Very closely, according to Cindy."

"Just how close is that?"

"Suppose you find out."

AFTER AN excellent lunch, I decided to give it a try. Not go for the marbles, just a little field work.

It took longer on the uptown campus than I had planned. This was because I spent the time looking for Mae Ling in all the wrong places. She hadn't come into his field for her doctorate; he had moved into hers. She had published a modest paper on the effect of nuclear residuals on marine organisms. Hutchner had hunted her out and offered to join forces.

A couple of other facts also became apparent. According to his colleagues, Hutchner had one of the keenest scientific minds alive and Mae Ling was an outstanding graduate student, even the more remarkable when you considered that she had walked out of China through Hongkong during the Red Guard fracas three years ago.

Driving down to the harbor

where the sea laboratory was docked, I thought of Cindy Hutchner and her long, bare little girl legs, her buttocks that wiggled when she walked, her six years in a sanatorium, and I began to wonder who was fooling whom.

The floating lab was a converted destroyer escort of World War II vintage. Conversion had added none of the comforts of home, but there was considerable more working space.

I found Mae Ling bent over a fancy binocular microscope. Even before she raised her head, I had decided, like Hutchner, that she would be a delight to join forces with, regardless of the field.

She studied my card, and then me, quizzically. Then she said soberly, "Perhaps I should be honored. I am not sure. I thought it was only in American detective fiction that one met a private detective, or should I say, private eye?"

The poet would probably kill me, but I decided to play it straight. "Miss Ling, Mrs. Hutchner is going to file for a divorce. You have been named as a possible corespondent."

"They should not be married, of course." She paused. "What is a cor-re-spondent? I am sorry; to me, it means one who writes letters."

"One less *r* in the spelling," I said. "In law, it means adultery."

She regarded me for a long mo-

ment. In the laboratory which we occupied alone, there was only the *plop-plop-plop* of the air bubbles forced by pumps through the aquariums and the sound of the ship rising and sinking against the piles with the movement of the tide.

She said finally, "I am sorry if you meant to shock me with that word. It is too unimportant."

"Just what is your relationship with Dr. Hutchner?"

Mae Ling smiled then and it was unfortunate. Her teeth told the story of a kind of living our boob box tends to forget, a kind of living where all beautiful women are not made up of white enamel. She had walked out of China.

"Come here, Mr. Jacobs." She beckoned me to the table beside her.

I moved forward.

"Look in this microscope, Mr. Jacobs. Here, I will turn on the light again." She did. The plane under the instrument was illuminated.

I bent over the instrument.

"The knobs on either side adjust the focus. Adjust them to your own eyesight, please."

I fiddled and came up with a mess of things, dominos and diamonds and little pill capsules; anchors and acorns that whipped and wiggled. I told her what I saw.

"You are looking at a planktonic soup, Mr. Jacobs. Without it

the seas would be empty. Without it having been, there would be no life on earth."

"Great," I said, "but I asked —"

"You asked," and her voice was suddenly angry, "what was my relationship with Dr. Alex Hutchner. That is my relationship with Dr. Hutchner. Look some more, please. Tiny things, micro-organisms. Upon them, the whole chain of marine life depends. This sample was taken off your own California coast. Here, Mr. Jacobs, between the shore and the Channel Islands."

"Look," I said, "I'm not here for a lesson in biology."

"Neither am I, Mr. Jacobs. What you just saw are tiny plants and creatures that are showing radioactive traces. Not natural, the results of fallout and the disposal of fissionable wastes offshore. Try to think about that, Mr. Jacobs, because that is my relationship with Dr. Hutchner!"

She was so damned serious and right, it made me mad. "Does that include sleeping with him?"

I thought for a moment she was going to strike me. She didn't, though. She said simply, "You are very foolish. The question is unimportant. You will forgive me. I have work to do."

There wasn't a damned thing left for us to talk about, so I went back up the ladder, down the gangplank and found my car.

There was only one thing of any importance I had learned and that was if Bill Blake brought Mae Ling into court he would be playing with dynamite.

I had the key in the ignition when my white collar friend put his hand on the door and said, "There's a bar and grill down at the end of the dock. I'll buy the beer or a cup of coffee."

"Why not?" I said.

I made the U-turn. So, we were going to have our informal conversation after all.

We found a corner booth beside a sunset window. The light from outside was all pearl grey, almost the color of the gull on the piling across the street. He had coffee and I had a beer.

"You've been talking to Mae Ling." The simple statement.

"Mostly," I said, "she's been talking to me."

"I know." He smiled. "I could give you a more accurate play-back than you could; we've got it all on tape."

"What in hell for?" I demanded.

"Right now, she's important to him. Hutchner's important to us. Damned important. It's as simple as that."

"It doesn't make a damned bit of sense. Cindy Hutchner is going to file for divorce. I doubt if Hutchner will or can contest it. It would be silly to pretend you don't know that I've been brought into the case to raise the ante.

Generally, I succeed. This being true, it would seem to me you're pushing at the wrong end. With the recent Bar Association actions being what they have, why not simply make certain the judge and the attorneys abide by their new ethics so there is no leak to the press? Then everything would be decided behind locked doors and all of the unpleasantness kept right there."

He shook his head. "I wish it were that simple. I also should warn you that we'll bring considerable pressure to bear to have your private license revoked if you continue on what appears to be an ill advised course."

"This is Los Angeles," I said.

"Los Angeles, California. Given a popular vote we could excommunicate the Chief Justice, particularly if you included Orange County. J. Edgar doesn't blow Gabriel's trumpet out here. I've done some dirty work but I've kept my nose clean. I've also done some pretty fair favors. I can come pretty close to telling you to go to hell. But why in hell should I? Like Charlie Brown says, 'I sure need all the friends I can get.'"

"We know you're smart," he said. He waited while the waitress gave him some more coffee. I ordered another beer. She left. He continued. "We also know you're reasonably tough, and for your racket, more honest than most.

"Do you know *why* Dr. Hutchner was run out of Japan?"

"Sure," I said, "it made the headlines. For the Pentagon, he was looking into the feasibility of limited nuclear weapons for Southeast Asia. This sort of thing is pretty upsetting in Japan."

"Yeah," he said, "damned true, too. But—"

"But what?"

The man grinned. "Public communication these days, Jacobs, is seldom total. Some people in the same club I'm in had to make damned sure that Hutchner was run out of Japan because the same guys that ran him out were trying to make arrangements for him to meet with Ho Chi Minh up until they discovered for sure that we weren't going to let it work. That's something Hutchner doesn't know, by the way."

I stared at him and tried to figure him out. The waitress brought my second beer. And I still hadn't added the sums. "Aren't you a damned fool to tell me this?"

He shook his head. "You wouldn't have the friends you have if you were strictly a percentage guy. I'm out from Washington, incidentally, not from the regional office. I've got a pretty free hand, providing the mission is accomplished. It will be."

I struck doggedly back into familiar territory. "The divorce depends upon Hutchner's personal

habits, not his politics. I really fail to see the direct connection. And for that matter, if you were able to circumvent the Japanese incident, why not this one?"

He shook his head. "A few months ago, yes. In this political year, no. The President has made his decision. The doves are cooing. We may be backing out of the dirty war. Now—" he paused and studied me intently—"what if we had to make some concessions to our good allies, what if we had to leave them with a superior 'clean' weapon, something Hutchner could come up with?"

"It wouldn't work," I said. There was nothing mellow in my beer. Nothing mellow anywhere.

He paid no attention to my comment. He said, "We know even more about Hutchner than we do about you. I won't comment on any areas that might affect your case. What I want to tell you is this. Hutchner has a great personal admiration for Ho Chi Minh. Why the hell shouldn't he? Good old Ho has been a dedicated revolutionary since about the days Chiang Kai-Shek got out the Green Gang in Shanghai; certainly long before Mao marched his farmers out of the Northern China.

"Ho has helped drive the toughest professional army that ever existed out of Indochina and fought the United States to a standstill. Ho wears no two-gun

belts, no silk suits, occupies no fancy palaces courtesy of ours or anyone else's government, plays China against Russia for maximum aid, and attracts the kind of support from his own people Vietnam can't even pretend—"

"Hey," I said, "I'll report you to the FBI."

He laughed at me. "Jacobs," he said, "we're dealing with Hutchner, admirer of Ho Chi Minh. I'm trying to give you the facts of the case, the kind that might lead Hutchner to defect. Finally, let me add Mae Ling."

"She walked out of China," I said. "She came voluntarily and she has bad teeth. I would guess she knows her stuff."

"The one thing you guessed is damned sure for true." He left me with that.

IT WASN'T DARK yet, so I decided to have a look at the Hutchner setup. And, it sure was that. Los Angeles is a series of depressed areas surrounding an indefinite number of Olympia. The Hutchner place appeared to be by Zeus. It's the kind of thing they don't quite hide behind blooming azaleas, the shadow grey of old olive trees moved in maturity and banks of iceland poppies. There were junipers, too, and lawn like a great new nylon carpet. The field stone front was an impressive facade. You had a feeling that a historical movie



crew was waiting the signal to move on set.

I parked the car down the road a piece, where it might look like it belonged to a legitimate visitor to an adjacent estate, and took a walk. I didn't approach Hutchner ground, I sort of snuck up on it. And in the gathering folds of dusk, I did pretty well by Davy Crockett's standards.

At first I had been a little worried about the possibility of a dog. Even a teacup full of chihuahua can be a hazard in my business. But as I progressed, making every point for my own platoon, I stopped worrying. Dogs give a practical value in return.

Cindy Hutchner, Mae Ling, what I had learned about Alex Hutchner, all suggested cats. Siamese, Burmese, even Abyssinian, but cats, nevertheless, and cats are the best friends a snoop like me can have. They keep quiet and mind their own business.

So I waited for dark, which wasn't far behind, in the folds of a weeping mulberry and watched the front windows.

I didn't see much, but what I

did see was enough. Cindy Hutchner came to a window at the east corner of the house and stood staring into the gathering gloom. After awhile, the curtains closed with her still standing there. Oddly, it took me a moment to realize she hadn't closed them herself.

My watch said it was just a little after six. Much too early for castle storming. I settled down to whiling the summer hours away in my leafy bower. I saw Mae Ling arrive. She came in one of those small cars that anyone with a sense of practicality and humor owns. She wore a very sleek red maxi with a mini slit up each side. Getting out of the car, she gave the effect of a strip tease where most girls fight with the facts of life.

After about half an hour, all sorts of people started arriving. Some of them, I wouldn't have given the time of night. There were quite a number of amulets and boots scattered among the three sexes.

It got dark finally. I made a necklace of my shoelaces, tied my shoes about my neck, and climbed the rain spout on the corner of the house where Cindy Hutchner had stood in the window. The damned thing was locked so I went up to the gutter along the edge of the roof.

The next trick was one for the books. It depended on two essentials: first that the gutter would

hold and secondly that judo twice a week plus some rather rigorous bits would pay off. In my business, irate husbands and enraged boy friends demand a special kind of agility.

First, I reversed one hand, grasped the curving edge of the gutter and swung out into space, catching the gutter with my other hand. Now, I was dangling from the rain gutter facing away from the house. My stocking feet climbed up the field stone behind me until I was in a half crouch. I hung there like a new fangled gargoyle while a pair of late comers arrived. Then I put the act into motion, shoving off with all the force I could muster, jacking forearms and biceps together.

Give me credit, I got up onto the roof clear to my knees. Only there was nothing for my toes to catch in, nothing left in me to push farther. When things went into reverse, it happened fast and the pain was like shooting stars. I don't know how near I was to letting go when the voice said:

"My goodness, Mr. Jacobs, I certainly didn't expect to find you here!" Cindy Hutchner was leaning out of her open window.

"Shut up and help me in," I gasped.

I had to reverse my hands and swing my body to face inward. Accomplishing that, I paid for all past sins and a number yet to come. Then, I walked my

cramped hands along the edge of the metal until she could pull my feet onto the sill. I sat on the edge of a chaise and worked my arms against the hurt in my shoulders.

"I heard something on the roof," Cindy explained, "and I couldn't imagine what it was."

"It was Tarzan of the half-apes," I said.

She was wearing a yellow nightgown of the sort that makes nudity seem somehow less revealing.

"You go to bed early," I said inanely. "I gather you're not going to the party."

"Of course not. I've been put to sleep." She smiled her little girl smile, which proved there might be something between us less obvious than what big girls are made of.

"I don't understand."

"Hutch gave me tablets in hot milk. He had to stop using the hypodermic when he saw how my arms broke out. After he locked the door and left, I went into the bathroom and put my finger down my throat. I do it all the time. That's how I know so much."

I unstrung my shoes from around my neck and put them on.

"You said, 'after he locked the door.' Does that mean you're a prisoner in this room?"

"That's what Hutch thinks." She had grasped her hands behind her back and was rocking gently on her bare feet. It made it hard for me to concentrate.

She stopped rocking and held out a hand. "Come here, Mr. Jacobs."

I came and she led me into her dressing room.

"Up there." She pointed.

Up there was mostly ceiling, a ceiling of warm fluorescent lighting artfully screened by translucent panels. "That corner panel," she explained, "it lifts up and slides over the next one. Then you open a trap door and there's storage space in the area between the ceiling and the roof. Just a flat floor of wood. You can crawl across the rafters and get out through another in the rear hall. Almost nobody uses the rear hall anymore."

"Well I'll be damned."

"So if you want to go to the party, Mr. Jacobs—"

"Sure," I said. "Why not?"

"But not yet. Not like you are."

"Let the party get started," I said.

Cindy Hutchner nodded, smiling.

"Meanwhile?"

"You could wash," Cindy told me, "and then you could take off your shoes again."

Like every good boy should, I did exactly as she suggested. And one thing more. Because it is a most unhandy thing if it is not handy, I tucked the Colt .25, the minimum protection which I always carry, into the drawer of the night table beside the bed.

She watched me with those large, dark, unbelievable little-girl eyes.

"It hardly even hurts," I told her. "Usually when it hits people it just makes them mad. But it is a gun, and a gun in the hand can be persuasive, even a little gun."

Then, we forgot entirely and completely about the gun, and even about the client-service relationship. At least, that kind of service.

FOR A LONG TIME afterward I lay and stared at the ceiling. Beside me, Cindy Hutchner was sleeping. No longer, however, did I think of her like a child over age in grade. She had survived her crisis and her stays in the sanatorium because she was like a cat, a highly bred, over-sexed, reasonably able to content cat. Unlike most of us among whom she lived, she was able to accept life up to a point and then as instantly to retreat.

Staring at the ceiling, I came to a rather important conclusion. Cindy had failed Hutchner because of his self-centered, implacable insistence on tailoring every instant to his own interests. His utilization of a wife depended upon not what he could give, but what he could take. He metered his desires to a time allotted, to his needs, not hers.

And how did this correspond with what my official friend with-

out a name had told me, with what Mae Ling had said and left unsaid because it was unimportant?

Mae Ling, China refugee, was working with Hutchner on the problem of nuclear infection of coastal marine life in the Santa Barbara Channel. Hutchner had traveled southeast Asia on behalf of the Pentagon and had been whisked out of Japan, among other reasons, to prevent a possible meeting with Ho Chi Minh. And I was lying in bed beside Cindy Hutchner almost as though I had agreed to be correspondent in her husband's divorce suit, which wasn't precisely the way this whole thing had started.

I glanced at my watch, moved it to catch a slant of the warm light from the dressing room. It was a little after nine o'clock. Bill Blake and his lovely wife would probably be sitting down to dinner. I wondered what the poet would do if he knew what his client and his private detective had been up to.

I slid out of bed and stood for a moment gathering in reality. Then, I dressed slowly. When I had suggested I might as well go to the party, Cindy had said, 'Not like you are.' I wondered what she meant, decided I should leave my jacket and tie behind. Along with my wallet, I tucked them neatly underneath the bed.

By standing on the dressing ta-

ble, I could reach the panel in the ceiling she had pointed out to me. It did push up and above the next and slide along a pair of tracks. The trap door beyond was equally simple, locking upward with a spring action.

I pulled myself onto the attic floor Cindy had described and reached down to pull the sliding illuminated panel back into place. It was halfway along the track when the door to the bedroom opened. A tall, lean man came in. Half suspended in space, I arrested the movement of the panel. He strode to the bed and looked down at Cindy.

I knew him, of course. His photographs were common property, but none of them, not even television interviews, had caught the coiled spring smoothness with which he moved. If he were a Petronius, a Sade, none of the degeneration had soiled his body any more than it had his mind.

This was Alex Hutchner, a man who could pay my sleeping client enough of a settlement that I wouldn't have to worry about who would cover my rent for the next six months.

This was a man whose mind his country couldn't let go.

The next part of the question also was underlined even as I hung scarcely balanced over the edge of the attic floor while Hutchner looked down at his wife, who was sleeping soundly for reasons

I damned well hoped he would never suspect.

Mae Ling came into the room behind him and moved cat-silent to stand at his shoulder. To keep things in perspective, I tried to remember the little sea animals swimming under the microscope in the floating lab, the girl who had walked out of Red China, the poverty of her smile.

She said something to Hutchner as they stood there beside Cindy.

I leaned as far as I could, knew only that she spoke.

Hutchner exploded. "Don't be a fool!"

Cindy started and her eyes flipped open.

"There, there, my dear," Hutchner said gently.

He reached down and grasped her bare shoulder. Cindy's head flopped from one side of the pillow to the other. I suspected she was looking for me. We all held our breath.

"Yes, Hutch," Cindy said. She relaxed and closed her eyes. She began to breathe deeply, evenly. It was a great performance.

Mae Ling began to whisper again. I began to hate that bitch. I couldn't hear a word she said.

Hutchner said, "No!" I heard that.

Mae Ling spoke rapidly.

Hutchner shook his head. He swung his glance from Mae Ling to his wife. He shrugged. "Why not?"

He turned away from the two of them and came toward the dressing room. I froze, stopped breathing. I did not even look at him as he passed under me. I've been too long in my business not to know that a person may become aware of a hidden, concentrated stare.

He went on beyond my hole in the ceiling into the bathroom. He opened and closed a door, ran water, came out and went back toward the bed.

He had a glass of water in one hand, something in the other. When he stood beside Mae Ling, he said, "God forgive us!"

It was like a stroke of lightning when it hit me. I slid the panel full open as quietly as I could, and ran my hands along the sides of the open trap door. I could drop down fast now.

He set the glass on the bedside table and knelt. Then I saw him open the vial in his other hand and pour its contents into his open hand. I began to move forward, my legs doubled so I could drop with enough spring in my legs to run. Only the action didn't belong to me.

It happened so fast, you couldn't believe it.

Cindy Hutchner sat up in bed, knocking his hand away in one instant and tugging open the drawer in the table at her side in the next. Then the gun, my little gun, was in her hand and Mae

Ling, knocking Hutchner aside, grasped Cindy's wrist. I came down from heaven as the shot exploded.

After that, there was sort of a shocked silence except for my landing on the floor and Cindy Hutchner, sobbing.

While I was looking into things, Hutchner proved no problem at all. He just stood there, staring. Cindy, big little girl, began to cry.

"Go lock the door!" I snapped to Alex Hutchner. He did.

"I should have let them do it," Cindy whispered. "I should've, should've, should've—"

"Shut up!" I yelled.

She did.

Except for the fact that Mae Ling had pulled the gun point away from Alex Hutchner and directly toward her breast, it wouldn't have been so simple. I truly don't know how else you could be sure of killing somebody with a .25 caliber automatic. In passing, I wondered if she had loved him, but there wasn't any time for wonder.

I simply began to talk, talk hard and fast. It made a certain insane kind of sense. And it took two kooks like these to make it work.

It took about ten minutes to sell the bill of goods and they had nothing better to offer. It all depended on Hutchner, of course.

Eleven minutes after the death of Mae Ling, I called the police.



Before they possibly could arrive, I made a second call. I didn't know his name, but I knew damned well that the message would reach him.

It was a week later I had lunch with the poet. It was at the Erasmus Club, of course, and Bill Blake was footing the bill. Why in hell shouldn't he? It's not every day that a practicing attorney gets the same sort of fee for a case settled out of court without contest that he planned to earn, fighting tooth and nail.

There was the one big lie; there had to be. The spilled sleeping pills on the floor, the glass of water beside the bed, they had been Mae Ling's idea. Well, they had. The only change I had made was to make certain her finger prints were on the empty vial and the glass.

The only fact we three ignored

was that Alex Hutchner ever had been in the room until after the shooting. It simply was unfortunate that Mae Ling had so fallen in love with her co-worker that she had tried to murder his wife.

Bill Blake wouldn't buy that, and he said so.

I agreed. "My federal friend doesn't think so, either. But with Cindy Hutchner dead that night under those circumstances, Mae Ling had Hutchner on a leash. Then there would be only the quiet little informalities of getting him to Peking, "via probably a very public visit to Hanoi." It made a good story, even better if you based it on what actually happened.

Another thing I couldn't tell the poet was that it had taken me just those ten missing minutes to convince Alex Hutchner of the sterility of acknowledging his guilt, of the absolute loss to the world that would occur if he were not to go on with his work. Then there had been the small formality of giving Cindy a divorce—on her terms—because she was saving him from a fate, if you will forgive the expression, considerably worse than death.

There was one other fact which I could and did mention to Bill. My federal friend had told me about it the day before he went back to Washington. It was his office which persuaded the local constabulary not to lift my private

license for giving Cindy Hutchner my gun.

It was little enough, he explained, in return for my closing the door to the People's Republic on Hutchner, a closing they had been able to shoot the bolt on by seeing that some unofficial rumors slipped through directly involving him with the girl's death.

About the third drink before lunch, the poet said morosely, "I still feel I can't trust you, Jake. The way we left it, you weren't even supposed to talk to Cindy

Hutchner until we got together in my office."

"Relax," I said. "You're going to get paid, aren't you? You don't want your client to slip back into a sanatorium before everything is settled, do you?"

"Now what in hell do you mean by that?" he demanded.

"I'm off on a vacation. After lunch, I'm on my way to Santa Barbara. They have one of the finest hotels on earth up there, one of the very best. It will do all three of us the world of good."



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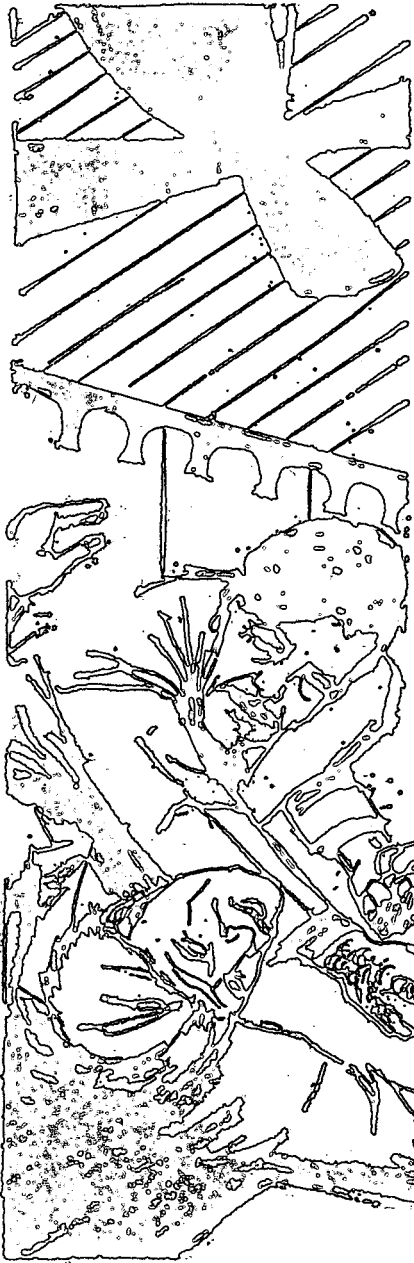
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CYCLE OF ASSASSINS

Things go in three, they say.
Like Fame . . . Lust . . . Murder . . .

by **GEORGE W. SMYTH**

PATO DE GANSO drove thankful-ly into San Juan and parked in front of El Infierno, his favorite bar in the little town. It would be good to see old friends of his boy-hood and bask in their adulation,

because he was known throughout Mexico as *El Mejor*, The Best. He was worshiped as a god of his profession, as some of the best bullfighters are so idolized.

But Pato de Ganso was not a bullfighter. He was a hired killer. Now he eased his trim and graceful body out of his car and with a proud strut as old and typical as his profession stalked his way into the hot little bar . . .

"AN ENDLESS trip through unknown parts of a strange country," said Harrison in a low, angry voice as the old bus creaked along the rutted road towards the out-of-the-way town of San Juan with an overflow of grimy passengers. He thought about his new car in storage back home, which for anonymity's sake he hadn't brought. When the sleek auto had roared by them a few minutes ago it had been hard to take and he bit down on dust and cursed.

"Peasants," mumbled Harrison, "miserable people with chickens yet on a bus."

He looked out at the dull and dry landscape and considered his problem: laying very low until the repercussion from his last job faded away and he could collect his total fee, five thousand. The five hundred in his pocket would last a good while where he was going.

Three months, thought Harrison, should about do it. In that

span of time before, all danger of getting caught by cops or someone from one of the other factions had always passed and he had collected his fees in total, large fees paid only to the best contract men. You want someone put away, went the saying among his younger competitors who were even now fighting among themselves, you get Harrison, the best in the business . . .

"I have come to make the arrangements concerning my next engagement," Pato de Ganso announced to all his friends in *El Infierno*.

"Where is this contest with the brave and elusive prey to be held?" a friend asked, smiling as if he knew it would really be no contest with *El Mejor* in command.

"Somewhere here in northern Mexico, a large territory, I can remind you! My first assignment in home country! I shall need your help with some of the details."

"Anything at all I will do for you," spoke up one of the younger men, who had only heard of his idol. "Sir," he went on timidly, "it may interest you to know I have been practicing the art, and someday I hope to follow in your glorious footsteps. But," he added hastily, "I have much to learn from you!"

"Then you must watch me closely," said Pato de Ganso.

"Even as a bull watches the cape."

"I will find something for you to do. Your name?"

"I am called *Ojo Caliente*."

"Hot Eye. Keep that eye open at all times."

"Both eyes will not be shut in your presence!"

"This is to be a very important fight for me," Pato de Ganso said, "and I would like all of you to be present, if it is at all possible, for the moment of truth!"

"*Viva!*" they all yelled, and Pato de Ganso looked over their heads, focusing his eyes on the bus across the street.

HARRISON SAT while all the passengers got off the bus. He had decided that this dirt and spit village would be his last hiding place. Retirement was next for him. Let the younger ones, the hot-eyed and fast-handed kids, get some money. He would have enough after the forty-five hundred to pick up after this three-months wait.

He got off the bus, brushing aside an old bent-over man holding a chicken, and saw the bar. His throat and body ached for whiskey. But he had to get his bearings first. He went in the hotel next to the bar, signed for a room and had his bag sent down a corridor.

"What is your business in San Juan, please?" asked the desk clerk, who had seemed amazed when Harrison registered.

"I'm here to write a book." That

answer was better than most, considering the fact he was probably the only tourist who had ever been in the town.

Bullfight music echoed out of the bar. Harrison was a fan of the art; he was an exponent of any profession involving danger and the element of chance. He walked in and pushed his way through men with bronzed faces and impassive features to the low wooden bar.

"Whiskey." The juke box became silent and Harrison realized now voices had stopped the minute he had entered. "Whiskey," he said again. "Anyone here speak English?"

"I speak English."

Harrison turned sharply around. A tall man dressed in a suit had spoken. "Good. I want whiskey." A bottle and glass appeared. "What's the celebration?"

"My friends are celebrating my arrival. These men, they are my *compadres!*"

"Swell. Here's to them and you," said Harrison, raising his glass, "and to the bulls!"

"Yes, the bulls. Your name, *compadre?*"

"Johnson," said Harrison, giving the name of his best junior colleague in the hired assassin game, Speedy Johnson, without first realizing it. Or, he wondered, was Speedy Johnson now a competitor working for someone else? In this business, he reflected,

watching the tall man lighting a cigar, you never knew for sure who was doing what, where, why, when, or for how much.

It was a crazy racket, full of vicious circles and cycles and changing viewpoints. He really didn't know if Speedy Johnson was alive or dead, and they were supposed to be colleagues under the same boss in this dangerous game with the sometimes deadly pay-offs.

The tall man puffed on his cigar and jabbered in Spanish to a young man, who seemed excited about something. The smoke bothered Harrison and he blinked his heavy-lidded eyes rapidly. He felt very nervous now for some reason. Travel nerves, he supposed. The bullfight music had resumed. Maybe this man was a bullfighter. It would explain the hero worship being showered on him.

"And your name?" asked Harrison.

The tall man told him, and the unusual name struck a vaguely responsive chord somewhere in Harrison's mind. It sounded like a bullfighter's name all right. Harrison strained his memory. He knew he hadn't been able to concentrate on anything lately, with the exertion of the last job still heavy on him.

"Your business?" asked the tall man.

"Writing a book about . . . a bullfighter," said Harrison, think-

ing he could get on the man's good side. "By the way, what is your business?"

Now, figured Harrison, was his chance. He was certain he had the man pegged. He envisioned a partnership with him. He would spend the three months with him writing a book. It was perfect, beautiful and perfect as simple things are. The three months would fly by.

"I have a feeling you can help me with this book," he said.

The tall and graceful man carefully laid his cigar down on the bar and knocked back a shot of tequila. The adoring audience closed in to hear what their idol and the imposter were talking about, and Harrison began to feel stifled, choked now with the heat of the afternoon and the encircling bodies pressing on him like a warm dampness.

The old man with the chicken still under his arm pressed closer than the rest of the chorus of admirers, and the chicken, with a push now from its owner, flew out with a great squawk and found a landing place.

Harrison reached his breaking point. From his shoulder holster he whipped out his .38, plucked the cackling chicken from off his head, flung it on the bar and blasted its head off.

"Chickens!" he spat to the gathering. "I hate chickens!"

Pato de Ganso had a soft spot

in his heart for old men, especially old bent-over men with fighting gamecocks under their arms. Now he was forced to get on with his business as *El Mejor* before the imposter started shooting up the whole bar.

He glared at Harrison, trying to compose himself, and his eyes glittered like two tiny and black pieces of obsidian. In that instant, Harrison, looking up, knew out of the far reaches of his mind who the man was. The quick and deadly eyes like sculptured jewels told him.

With the peculiar goose-step Pato de Ganso was noted for and from which his name derived, he backed into three of his fans to give himself room. Then he sprung out his stiffened leg and the toe of his boot caught Harrison's pointed gun, and the .38 went flying.

"I have the gun!" shouted the fan called *Ojo Caliente*.

"The gun is not necessary," said Pato de Ganso, who had long suppressed a desire to be a *matador*.

"Let me assist you!" begged Hot Eye.

"Do not be impetuous, young one," said Pato de Ganso, plunging his long knife into Harrison's heart, and the imposter met his painless moment of truth, his face in the dust of a strange arena.

"I wanted to be of service," lamented Hot Eye.

"Your day will come," said Pato de Ganso, the best in the busi-



ness, wiping his knife on the dead rooster on the bar and brushing feathers from his suit, "your day will surely come if you are patient and not of nervous manner and do not try to be someone you are not."

Pato de Ganso, The Best, *pistolero* de luxe, thirst slaked, friendships renewed, another task almost completed, drove out of San Juan towards the border and his pay-off point at the all-night diner by the international bridge.

His business in San Juan had been easy, thanks to a good description of the looks and mannerisms of Harrison provided by his client. The youngster, Hot Eye, had helped also with his warning that Harrison had been carrying a gun. But where was he now? He had been assigned to help carry Harrison to his grave, but he had suddenly disappeared.

He wondered now what the gringo gunman had done with the rest of his pay-off money, the other forty-five hundred. He stepped up the speed, thankful there would be

no waiting around at the border for payment. Waiting . . . was always dangerous.

TENSE YOUNG hands steering his pieced-together jalopy expertly, wide open and hot eyes dancing back and forth from the dark road to the shiny cara head flashing in and out of his dim headlights, the youthful apprentice, *Ojo Caliente*, with the large and single-minded ambition to shoot his way into the big time of a profession older and more dangerous than bullfighting, spoke now, softly, to himself:

"I wanted to be of service and I wanted to learn from you, but you did not trust me. You ordered me to carry the dead gringo to his grave, a humiliating thing. And not you, but your *compadres* have told me that he was a *pistolero*, like us, but not the best as you have been called—too long. I know where you are going to receive your large payment.

"Your *compadres* have in their drunkenness told me. After you pick up that sack of gringo dollars, I shall show you a trick of my own, a trick not with the feet or the legs but with these hands of mine, which are quicker than any eyes . . ."

PATO DE GANSO laughed loudly now into the wind rushing in the window.

"I am The Best!" he yelled out to the black road in front of him.

Jeweled eyes then caught the reflection of dim headlights in the rear view mirror. He could not shake the car, so he reduced speed to let the driver pass.

"Nothing must make me nervous now," he muttered, motioning with his arm for the driver to pass. "I must collect some money."

Ten thousand dollars was up at the border, waiting to be claimed by the best man in the business.

A CAREFREE young man named Speedy Johnson, known in some circles as "Crown Prince", drove his powerful sports sedan up close to the international bridge, parked behind a seedy joint named Last Chance Diner, smiled and began to wait. He set his cold eyes on the bridge sign *PEDESTRIAN CROSSING* fifty yards away.

He was a little nervous after the short drive at top speed to the border, but he was mainly thankful that he was, finally, after three years working with the same outfit as Harrison, a free-lance gunman.

He was thankful also that he had spent time last summer cultivating contacts in out-of-the-way hideouts like that dull and dumpy San Juan. He smiled wider; he must remember to send that little hotel desk clerk with the big ears a nice bonus for telephoning him the scoop so fast.

He watched the floodlit bridge sign and thought with intense

pleasure of the ten grand he would expropriate from that Mexican fellow with the funny name that the desk clerk hadn't bothered to translate. That easy money which was practically staring him in the face, being inside the diner with someone, plus Harrison's uncollected forty-five hundred already in his pocket would make a nice nest-egg.

He observed people gathering in the small plaza in front of the diner. They were examining a bullfight poster that had just been pasted on a wall. Speedy thought that was something he would like to try.

"I was pretty good last summer in San Juan," he said to himself, "with that young kid, Hot Eye, helping me by showing the best passes. Someday, I'll do that kid a favor, like he did me."

Then he saw the Mexican described to him by the desk clerk come through the pay turnstile and approach the diner. He had one eye swollen and blackened and was favoring an arm. The clerk had not told him that. So, thought Speedy, Harrison went down with a fight.

Then Speedy saw, as the Mexi-

can came into the open, that he was walking very strangely. He was dragging one leg slowly, and then stiffening the other out in front and swinging it up high before putting it down and dragging up the other leg.

"I would say that man is putting somebody on, or else has the craziest natural walk I've ever seen," whispered Speedy in disbelief. The clerk had not told him about the walk either. "Or else, he's been in the wildest fight going anywhere!" So, he thought again, you don't get the best in the business, as Harrison used to be, without a fight.

But Pato de Ganso's face was flushed with the smug look of very recent victory, and Speedy Johnson, "Crown Prince", knowing this look, carefully checked again his new snub-nosed .45 before he silently eased out of his car.

With a lordly swagger befitting the absolute master of a vulnerable and treacherous calling, he arrogantly stalked the oddly strutting Mexican gunman into the diner, a kingly look of ascendancy already resting firmly and regally on his face.

ANOTHER MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL NEXT ISSUE

THE MISSING GABRIEL HORN

Soft, incredibly beautiful, the music from that horn slid across the silent room. It was good, all right, and it was played by a master. But—was it playing for my funeral?



by MICHAEL AVALLONE

MELISSA MERCER'S voice on the squawk box hit a blues note. "Ed—you won't believe this but Ace Waverly is standing right in front of my desk."

"You mean the man with the horn?"

"Nobody else."

"Send him in. If you type your bills up by twelve, I'll take you to lunch and maybe get you his autograph."

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"I've already got it, Mr. Smart. This is the first famous client you've had since I started working for you."

"Don't rub it in."

I clicked the button on the box down and straightened my tie. The office door opened and Ace Waverly ambled in. He was big and black and very famous. We shook hands and I waved him to the client chair across from me.

featuring

ED NOON



"Glad you could see me, Mr. Noon."

"Ed to you, Ace. I've played *White Hot Polka* too many times to consider you a stranger."

"Thank you, man. That's right neighborly. Music to these old ears."

He wasn't a hard man to admire. He was one of the greatest names in jazz music, on a level with Armstrong and Henry Busse. But he was old now. Over sixty and the famous trumpet was close to retirement. I had lost touch with his career for the last five years. Not since the *Freedom March Rag* was on the charts.

His big body flowed over the chair. He cupped his hands over a three-button sharkskin suit, cocked his head at me and the wide smile that not even the bell of his trumpet could hide, flashed and lit up the office. He looked almost sheepish.

"Guess you may be wondering what I need a private detective for."

"Sort of. But there's no hurry. Take your time. We could talk about music if you like."

"Wish that was all I was here for. But it comes to the same thing at that. I want you to find somebody for me."

"Who?"

"A mystery man. Mr. X." His white teeth clicked together. "A real gone man, Ed."

I nodded. "In the words of your

profession, why not take it from the top?"

Waverly liked that. So he did. I settled back in my swivel and listened.

It was the middle of the week and nothing was hanging over me on the schedule. Fact is, it had been a lean month. Crime—the personal kind that needs private Richards—had come to a roaring halt.

"You know Chicago, Ed?"

"A little."

"That's where it all started. In Chi. At *The Blue Bayou*. On a real hot night last month—"

It developed that Ace Waverly, on the last swing of a junket through the country, was playing a three-day engagement at *The Blue Bayou*, a famous Loop nightspot. He had played some of his greatest music there.

On the night in question, a well-dressed stranger, obviously free, white and twenty-one, got up from his ringside table and sat in with Ace's combo during a dance break. Before anyone could stop him, the kid had taken a real ride on the famous horn of Ace Waverly.

Once he started, nobody wanted him to stop. It was the sweetest, purest music this side of Bourbon Street. The customers went ape and the strange 'guest artist' played for nearly a half hour. Ace himself was entranced rather than annoyed when he came back from a

cigarette break in the alley. The music was from Cloud Number Nine.

Sitting right by the bandstand was a tall, dark-haired angel in a blue clinging gown who only had eyes for the young man with the horn. Finally, the music stopped and *The Blue Bayou* went bug-house with applause. People milled all around the bandstand. Ace Waverly rushed forward to sign the miracle horn worker on the spot.

A genuine talent can always spot another genuine talent. And like the old great he was, Ace saw in the newcomer the man who had fit title to his horn. In a word, his *protege*. His legacy to the music world. Someone to carry on when he left off.

But in the confusion, the young cat vanished with his Angel Blue Gown in tow. Ace couldn't nail him down in time. By the time he reached the street outside the club, his only clue was a cream-colored Cadillac pulling away from the curb.

Back in the club, no one had the answers to any of the Ace's important questions. The hatcheck girls had never seen the handsome couple before. The waiters could not place them, either. But the cigarette girl who had sold them a pack of *Regents*, had heard the Angel in the Blue Gown call the young guy 'Harry' two times.

I grinned at that. "You sure it wasn't Harry James out with Betty Grable in a black wig?"

"My eyes aren't what they used to be, Noon man. But I've heard them all. And James on his best day never sounded like that. Nobody did. 'Sides, he was just a boy, like I said."

I asked him some questions but he was way ahead of me. He had checked out all the booking agencies in Chicago, all the agents in the business and had even put out tracers to *Variety* and *Billboard* and *Cash Box*. Nobody had ever heard of a young Harry who played a great horn.

So I had to settle for nothing but a physical description of Mr. X. Tall, kind of thin, wavy blond hair. Anywhere from twenty-one to twenty-five. Not much more. Maybe twenty million suckers look like that. Mr. Very Average Young Man.

"That's your real reason for wanting to find this kid, Ace? You want to make him your *protege*."

"Man, what else? He was like the Angel Gabriel playing away. Sweet, loud and pure. It's worth five hundred to me to start you off. And another five if you locate him. If it takes longer, we'll work something out."

"You got a deal."

With the five hundred dollars on the desk between us, all in crisp century bills, Waverly lumbered to his feet. There was a trace of sad-

ness in the dark face. Only the eyes flashed with warmth. For a split second, I could see how old he really was, how heavy the horn might have gotten these past few years:

We shook hands and he turned and shuffled out of the office. He was staying at the Americana for the remainder of the week before flying out to California for a date at the Hollywood Bowl. He was the Big Time all right. As big as they make them.

Melissa rushed back into the office almost as soon as he was gone. She wore a big smile as only a beautiful woman can. I discussed the case with her when we stopped talking about Ace Waverly and his music.

"Make arrangements for me on the Chicago flight out of Kennedy anytime today, Mel. I'll get cracking on this."

She nodded. "You never were one to let the grass grow under a case. Got any ideas?"

"Lots of them."

"Go ahead. I'm listening, Sherlock."

"The young guy. Loaded. Rich clothes. A Cadillac. A beauty out with him on the town. Acting like she was engaged to him from all the accounts. That makes him a native of Chicago for my dough."

"Go on. I'll buy that."

"He can't be a working musician, it seems. Somebody would have known about him if that's

how good he is on the horn. Who travels around maybe getting his kicks sitting in with jazz musician greats. Anyhow, that's my first impression."

"And your second one?"

"Is that I'd better get to Chicago because that's where the answer is. If any. Will you miss me?"

"I always miss you," Melissa Mercer said.

I had to buy her lunch after that, whether she had typed up the bills or not. Traveling light, with only an overnight bag, I took the four fifteen jetliner out of Kennedy on Flight 18.

It was a warm June day and skies over Manhattan were full of low-flying planes.

But I had nothing but missing horn players on my mind as the jet thundered toward the Windy City.

The Blue Bayou was jumping with a heavy evening trade as I marched in. I asked for the manager. A grim-eyed waiter blinked at my New York suit and took a buck from me as a reward for the service. I meandered toward the smoke-filled, dim bar and ordered a Scotch on the rocks to while away the time.

A rapid survey of the bandstand and vicinity showed me just how easy it would have been for the kid with the horn to have ducked out on Ace Waverly. It was smaller than a breadbox and twice as cramped. With a milling

crowd, it would have been a cinch to vamoose without being stopped.

When the Scotch was before me, I eyed the bartender. He was typical but he looked more friendly than usual. Instead of looking through me, he looked at me. So I pumped him a little while I waited for the manager.

He remembered the particular night because it had been something of a local sensation. Ace Waverly hadn't let it die, either. The bartender was hooked because 'Harry' and his swell-looking dame had had some drinks at the bar before the sitting-in bit on the bandstand.

"Notice anything unusual about this Harry?" I asked.

"Nah. Just the rich clothes and the nice manners. Oh, yeah. He had on a big ring. Pinky of his left hand. A signet job, like an heirloom. Real old style ring. A beauty. As big as a grape."

"Know anything about rings?"

He looked surprised that I doubted him. "You kidding me? My brother-in-law's a jeweler. I've seen rings like that before. Heavy gold, large ruby like."

"Thanks." I laid a fin on the bar. "Keep the change."

"You're a sport, sport," He grinned. "Here's the manager. Mr. Felker."

Felker was small, dapper and a white carnation was as frozen in his lapel as his smile. The kind you can never trust all the way.



He could have just been the Mine Host who stays polite to keep your business.

"You wanted to see me, sir?"

I introduced myself, showed him my permit and licenses and mentioned that I had been hired by Ace Waverly.

Felker smiled and shook his head.

"The old dog won't let go. Well, it was a bone all right. If he ever finds that kid, he'll make some more history."

"Did you notice anything unusual about the kid?"

"I never saw him before. But I'll say this much. The woman with him was class, too. I know the type. Grace Kelly, Jackie Kennedy, that sort of woman. She doesn't bend her elbow without saying, 'Excuse me' first."

"A lady," I agreed. "To the manor born. What about the young man with the horn?"

Felker shrugged. "Never did a day's work in his life. You can tell. It wasn't just the clothes. His hands were softer than a baby's. I spotted them when they came in. I

pride myself on reading people. Ten will get you one he's somebody's heir."

I liked that conclusion because I was working along similar lines of investigation. Everything seemed to fit so far.

"Any trouble in the club since that night?"

Felker's smile was honest, now. "Don't be a mark. It was good for business. All we get are the crowds, now. Everybody just keeps hoping the Phantom will show up again and give them another treat. They like music in this place, Mr. Noon. The hotter and sweeter the better."

"Mind if I browse around the club?"

"Help yourself. Ask all the quizzes you want. You give the joint atmosphere, shamus."

"They don't call us shamuses anymore, Felker. Not since Bogart's last movie. I'm just a private operator."

"In the public eye." He laughed and waved his arms airily. "Well, enjoy yourself." He spun on his heel and took off. He had said all he had to say.

It took me about fifteen more minutes to pump whatever information was left in the brains and memories of the personnel of *The Blue Bayou*. Waiters, hatcheck girls and cigarette girls all remembered the night but not much of the details.

Except for one smart girl who

had enough curves and bumps to merit a Bunny graduation to the Playboy Club. Her name was Clare Adams and she was the concession female who had sold the Regents to Mr. X.

"He was a real cute kid, Mr. Noon," she babbled on, happy to help and doubly pleased with another five dollar tip. "Nothing square about him for all his loot and good clothes. Yeah. She called him Harry a couple of times."

"Did you hear what he called her?"

"Sure. Her name. Real crazy name. Wait a mo. Hold it—let's see now. Bettina! That's it—Bettina.

Never knew a girl with that name before. Is it Italian?"

I hid my disappointment. "Little bit. Maybe. Thanks, Clare. Don't sell any wooden cigarettes."

On my way out of the club, I thought that one over.

'Harry' was bad enough but now 'Bettina' surely seemed like a gag in the James-Grable vein. Maybe the mystery man had a sense of humor, too. But why not *Betty* instead of *Bettina*? Something worked around in my own brain but I couldn't straighten it out.

On the dark sidewalk with intermittent neon illuminating the narrow street, I looked for a cab. I didn't find one in time. A long sleek car slithered up to the curb.

There was no doorman on duty, either. Most unusual.

Before I could make any sense out of that, a big, gorilla-type man had sprung from the back door of the car. He poked a gun into my face before I could make myself scarce. I was caught flat-footed because this was one assignment I hadn't expected any hardware on.

The gun, hard and brittle, rammed into my ribs. The gorilla man breathed into my face. He smelled like old shoes and hard times.

"Get in, big nose. You poke it around too much. It's about time somebody broke it off."

As I was getting into the car, trying to count the odds, he slugged me from behind. Crisply, very professionally.

Up the street, a car horn blared.

It sounded awful.

THEY WERE pros, all right. Trouble was, they didn't know they were going up against another pro. My head hurt but it was still okay.

I woke up because the gorilla man was sloshing a bottle of whiskey into my face, making me smell like a brewery. I got the message in a flash: The car motor was running, even though we weren't moving.

I couldn't see a damn city light anywhere. There were cricket sounds and night noises. It figured; it was the old drunken driver

rubout. Who would bother to examine a flaming wreck with a rummy at the wheel?

It's been tried on me before.

I brought my knee up into the gorilla's groin as he bent over me. His face exploded with agony. I twisted to one side and batted the side door open. As I fell through, I tugged the long gun from the gorilla's fingers. There was a shadowy figure at the wheel of the car, making some last minute arrangements. Like unlocking the emergency brake to speed me to an early grave.

The shadowy figure whirled and his gun spat out orange flame and noise. Rolling and falling, I snapped off a shot. After that, the whole deal went crazy. The car shot into motion, roaring down a sharp grade.

It all happened too quickly, as the saying goes. The gorilla was not helping any, either. He couldn't. I had left him clutching his midsection in agony. With probably a dead man at the wheel. I couldn't have helped them if I had wanted to and I didn't. I don't waste sympathy on organized killers anymore.

There was an embankment down below and the car went over it, arcing into the dark night. The thunderous explosion that followed lit up the evening sky. I didn't bother looking at the remains.

All I was aware of was that

Ace Waverly's harmless search for a missing horn player had taken on all the special qualities of some of the worst murder cases in the universe.

Was it worth killing for?

Why was it worth killing for?
I didn't know.

Not even the Angel Gabriel could have answered those questions.

A potentially big lead had gone up in smoke. Two goons hired to rub out a private investigator. I had no known enemies in Chicago but that didn't mean anything. Peppery people move around a lot. Especially enemies. It was still hard to believe that the whereabouts of a horn playing genius had put the 'pressure' on. It was not in the cards, really.

I walked out to the highway, thumbed a ride from a fruit truck heading back to town and re-oriented myself. The driver said we were about fourteen miles out of Chi. I had been taken for a ride, all right, in old-style Capone fashion. The world just hadn't changed that much, trips into outer space or not.

So I dropped in at the nearest police precinct when the fruit truck driver let me out. A lieutenant of detectives named Ferguson was glad to see me. When I identified myself and flashed all my ID's it seemed we had a mutual friend in Captain Michael Monks of New York Homicide. Ferguson

knew all about me, which helped a lot. He treated me like visiting dignitaries.

He knew little about Ace Waverly and the ruckus at *The Blue Bayou*. It hadn't been a squeal for his department so it could have been something that happened on Mars.

We had two cups of coffee and half a pack of cigarettes before I left him at his desk.

"You write off the two goons then?" I asked.

"Uh huh. Just figure a pair of heisters tried to mug a night club patron. The whiskey business could have been part of a blackmail set-up, not the rubout you imagine. Anyhow, when we sift the wreck, if we find anything, I'll let you know."

I closed his Missing Persons File which I had spent a lot of time checking for tall, dark-haired girls who might be named *Bettina*. Just a hunch. Maybe she was missing too. From a rich old father or something. I was beginning to get very confused, wondering if Ace Waverly hadn't held out on me in the information department. You can never tell for sure about that, either. No matter how well you think you know people. Celebs aren't saints or exceptions.

Ferguson said good-by, told me to give Monks his regards and let me walk out of his precinct. I took a cab back to the hotel where I was hanging my hat for

the Chicago stay and put in a long distance call to Ace Waverly at the Americana. It was a little after ten o'clock but I took my chances on his being in.

He was.

"Noon, man. How's it going?"

"A little progress. Listen. Don't get sore. Did you tell me everything I should know about this kid?"

"Sure. Why you say that?"

"I had to swat two houseflies off me tonight. Chicago variety. Know anything about that?"

"No. What you talking about, Noon man? You're blowing hard but I can't read your notes."

"Okay. Just stay put at the hotel for awhile. Call you again tomorrow."

"Noon." His voice was almost an entreaty. "Find that boy for me and I'll double the price."

"Sure," I said. "Why not?"

I hung up, thinking. He sounded real forlorn to me. More than he had been in my office only that morning. Things had moved pretty fast for such a gay, innocent little case. It just didn't add up or make any sense at all.

It made less sense about twenty minutes later. There was a knock at my door. When I answered it, a Western Union boy was standing there with a telegram. I signed for it and tried not to frown. The unusual features were piling up.

The telegram was a dilly:

Meet me at the Flamingo. I want to save your life. I'll be wearing a blue gown. Will wait until you come.

A Friend Indeed

I never got a telegram like that before.

Not even a singing one could match it for eloquence and pleasant surprise.

I got cleaned up and redressed in a hurry.

The Flamingo proved to be another smoky bar-niterie about several notches below *The Blue Bayou* on the social scale of things. I spied the telegram-sender in a flash. One of the loveliest girls I had ever seen was parked in a corner booth nursing a solitary cocktail. The blueness of her dress was staggering. It was like condensed lightning. She glowed in the gloom.

She may have had the style, looks and manners of the Kelly-Kennedy females but her voice was right out of Texas Guinan and Ethel Merman. Loud, sassy and brassy.

There was another drink placed at the empty corner of the booth. I spotted that trick, too. A device used by lovely ladies to keep the drunks and lecherous male patrons at bay. *The Flamingo* was that kind of dump. No place for a lady.

I sat down next to her. She nodded, violet-blue eyes racing

over me and finding something to be happy about.

"Your friends play rough," I said.

"Mister, I'm doing you a favor. They're no friends of mine. But I can be your friend. You want to stay out of the graveyard, you take the next plane back to New York."

I sipped the drink. It was Scotch on the rocks, too.

"I can't. I have to find a horn player for a nice old colored man named Ace."

She shivered in that interesting blue gown and the two main points of interest gleamed like lightning bolts.

"Listen, Mister Noon. A big influential man knows why you're here. He'll do anything to stop you. You gotta stop looking for the horn player. If you don't, it will be a long solo for you. All the way to eternity and the next life. You dig?"

"I dig. Thanks, loads. I appreciate the tip, Tina."

She blinked and looked down at her own drink. Her breasts jumped again.

"You know my name, huh?"

"Not too hard. He's Harry. Why didn't he call you Betty instead of Bettina? Like they told me back at *The Blue Bayou*, it's a crazy name. I figured he might like to jive up a name like that, sometimes. I say Tina. Bet-Tina, see? You dig? Crazy. There just

had to be a reason for a name like Bettina. Tina what?"

She ignored that. "You've been warned. I'm through talking to you. It's your funeral."

"Don't go. I want to hold your hand—"

She stood up. She had a magnificent figure, blue gown and all. Her face was exquisitely unforgettable. The voice was a mockery of time and place.

"Thought you were a big city boy, Noon," she rasped, "but you're just a dumb wise guy. So long, Sucker."

While she was busy calling me names, I had stolen her purse. Sliding it along the cushions we were sitting on so that now it lay across my lap, out of sight under the tablecloth. She was too upset with me to notice. So she made her huffy exit from the table without missing it right away.

As soon as she disappeared among the clamoring, noisy patrons, I found the men's room just a few tables away. In there, I quickly hid behind a stall and rifled the purse. It was a beaded, shining little thing but it held all I wanted.

There was an address book and a driver's license in the name of *Tina Phillippi, 14 Chelton Avenue, Chicago, Illinois*. Satisfied, I restuffed the purse, went back to the booth and returned it to the cushions.

I left the booth shortly after

that because the boys in the band were taking a break. Tina didn't come back to look for her purse. At least, I never noticed.

I had a smoke with the bandsmen, making small talk and generally acting like a jazz buff. They had been pretty good, too. Smooth and mellow, what little I had heard during the parlay with Tina Phillippi. A lady who seemed to know a lot about me.

The musicians let their hair down. The pay was bad, the hours were worse than a ball club with a heavy night game schedule and a man was a chump to take up music for a living. I could have told them that the private investigation racket was just as bad, but I didn't. I got what I wanted, though.

The boys in the band had never heard of any 'Harry' or a doll named Tina Phillippi mixed up in the music business. Not as far as Chi was concerned anyway, and they had been playing Chicago for over a year now.

So it was still a very private affair, as far as I could tell. Harry and his black-haired, blue-gowned angel.

I left *The Flamingo*, went home to bed in the hotel and left a wake-up call for six o'clock. At seven, I was parked on the corner of Shelton Avenue, just before Number 14. I had a fresh pack of Camels opened, a loaded .45 and a world of patience.

It was time for nothing so simple as another old-fashioned device. A stake-out.

At eight o'clock, a tall, wavy-haired, well-dressed young man stepped out of a cab before Number 14 and hurried into the building. Smiling, I locked the doors of the car and sauntered across the street after him. I had all the time in the world now. Borrowed though it might be.

I was sure my search for the



missing horn player was over. I knew I'd find him in Tina Phillippi's apartment.

The well-dressed young man was wearing a pinky ring that shone like a star in the morning sun.

And I was going to talk to him before he blew another note and disappeared again.

GETTING IN was child's play. Another five dollar bill to a hungry doorman and I had Tina Phillippi's apartment number and floor. Chicago hadn't changed much at all since the old days.

Money still talked, loud and clear.

17-A's door was open.

I walked right in. I knew what I had to do and what I wanted to do. But there is a limit to nosiness and detection, no matter how pure the motives are.

Tina Phillippi and the wavy-haired young guy were locked in a kiss that would have made Burt Lancaster and Deborah Kerr blush from here to eternity. My apologetic cough only made things worse. I felt like a lousy peeping tom.

The girl screamed and the kid rushed me. His face was blood-red and mad. I side-stepped him and let him run right by before I grabbed his wrist, swung him around, and sent him flying back into her arms.

"Save your wind, horn boy. I'm here to help, not hinder you. She's wild about you, Harry. Be grateful for that. Thanks to her, I may be able to put an end to all your troubles."

He came back to his feet, glaring at me.

"You two-bit detective!" he said firmly. "Get out. We don't want you and we don't need you."

"Want to bet?" I stared at Tina, who was trying to compose herself, rebuttoning a sheer pale silk dressing gown. "Tina, make him listen. I won't be long-winded."

"I'll bet." She sighed and put her arm out to Harry. "Let him

talk, honey. He's no chump or else he'd never have been able to locate us this fast. Who knows? Maybe he *can* help at that."

The young guy kept on glaring. He composed himself, though. His hands went to his tie. Soft-looking, like Felker had said.

"All right," he growled. "But quick now. I'll give you two minutes and then out you go. Quietly or I'll throw you out."

I laughed. "You've got enough lip for two horns, son. Listen and listen good. I know you don't want to be a lousy millionaire like dear old Dad. But I'm here because Ace Waverly thinks you're the hottest horn he's ever heard in sixty years of sucking wind. What do you say to that?"

He didn't have to say. Lights came on in his two blue eyes. Sparks of joy and radiance shot from his face. But his broad shoulders sagged in his fancy morning coat.

"So you know all about Peck and his bad boy, huh? How come?"

"Not too hard. You were described to me as well dressed. You drive around in Cadillacs. Miss Phillippi here is a knockout. Poor boys and poor musicians can't afford cars like that or girls like her. Of course, she could have been keeping you. But I dug up more. The bartender at *The Blue Bayou* mentioned that fancy ring on your finger right

now. He said and I quote: *heirloom*. Right away I thought of rich old families or at the very least, a college fraternity ring."

The boy held up his left hand. The pinky ring glowed.

"My grandfather's. A genuine antique. Solid gold. The ruby's real, too."

I smiled. "Trust bartenders to know. Then two goons tried to kill me. Right off it reminded me of the old days when Big Business pressed buttons to have pesky mosquitoes flitted out of existence. But I'm here now and Tina warned me. So I rule her out and rule you in. Want to tell me the rest of it, Harry? Take your time. I've got all week."

Tina moved to the kitchenette somewhere beyond the neat orderly living room. "I'll mix us some drinks. Tell him, honey. Maybe, it's for the best."

"Maybe," he muttered. "I'm not sure."

"If you don't talk now, you *will* pay later," I reminded him. "Murder is still against the law."

He still glowered and growled at me but Tina came back with the drinks and her violet-eyes and honeyed assurances finally got him off the ground. I settled down to listen to the story of the Poor Little Rich Boy, Number Ninety Thousand.

Harry was Harrison Dudley The Second. Young scion of a fortune amassed in the sheet music

publishing game. The First was his father; a man who hated music and musicians regardless of the simple fact that it brought him his money and his six-car garage. He would do anything to keep Harry out of the profession and already had.

So Harry found himself unable to turn his back on his wealth and rough it in the classic style because the old man had threatened to cut Harry's mother off without a cent if he did. So Harry still-nursed his horn and his first love the way he did when Ace Waverly first heard him. Sitting in wherever and whenever he could and then disappearing like a phantom.

Harry The First did not approve of Tina Phillippi either because she used to sing with a band. But Tina gave that up at least to keep the old tiger quiet about something. Because Harry needed her. Poor Harry.

"You telling me that your father wouldn't stop at having me killed just to keep Ace Waverly from finding you and making a musician out of you?" Talk about the idle rich!

"I wouldn't put it past him."

"Me neither," Tina Phillippi shuddered. "I saw them kidnap you."

Harry The Second nodded. "If it ever got out in the papers about his son wanting to be a horn player, it'd kill him."

I could tell by that answer that in spite of everything, the boy still loved his old man.

"What do we do now?" Tina asked. "You might as well go home, Mr. Noon. It's a Mexican standoff this way."

"I don't know from Mexico. Ace Waverly wants Harry. It could mean the biggest career in the world for your darling. A real jump into the musical heavens. Won't you at least see Ace, Harry? Tell him the spot you're in. He's an old man too and you could save him a lot of money and a lot of heartaches looking all over the country for something that doesn't exist. That can't exist, to hear you tell it."

"I'm all mixed up—"

Harry was. His face was miserable, now. "If only Dad wasn't so dead-set against it."

I took the poor bull by the rich horns.

"Listen. Let's go see Harrison Dudley The First. I'll like to talk to him. Maybe he'll change his mind."

"You're dreaming, mister," Tina laughed.

"Maybe I am, but why aren't you both willing to try?"

Harrison Dudley The Second squared his shoulders and glared at me. He clasped Tina's hand close to his side.

"Damn you, but we will try. How about it, Tina? One more jump at the old tiger?"

"Sure," she said, defeatedly. "What can we lose that we haven't lost already?"

"That's the ticket," I said. "Real soldiers. The pair of you. Come on. The sooner the better. I want to get back to New York in time for the cherry blossoms."

They weren't looking at me anymore. Or listening, either. Like the song says, they only had eyes for each other.

Love.

Horns.

Rich kids.

Hooey.

IT WAS A large estate on the outskirts of the city. Stone and steel and ivy-covered walls. A fortress also from the old days. Al Capone might have slept there.

We marched in, unannounced.

The old man was in the library when we got there. When he looked up from the book that he was reading and saw his son and Tina Phillippi and a complete stranger, he let his face go from beefy grey to beefy red. He was a big man with large hands and a larger stomach.

"Harry—Tina—who is this man?"

"Relax, Dudley The First," I said, easily enough. "Stop playing Napoleon, Hitler and Mussolini with these kids' lives. You tried to have me killed too, by pushing buttons. I don't like that."

I'm a big man now. I could go to the law."

I had told the kids to keep quiet while I played it by ear. But it was making them damn uncomfortable. They were shifting on their feet, trying to avoid the old man's eyes. Dudley The First frowned at me in surprise.

"You? Who the hell are you to come marching into my home with accusations? Harry—Tina—what is this all about?"

Again, they avoided answering him directly. He fumed and glared back at me, sensing immediately that I was the instigator and cause of all his new-found fury.

"If the butler were here, I'd have you thrown out, you hoodlum. Now, speak your piece. Why have you come here?"

"All right, I will. I don't understand a rich father who will stand in the way of a son with a great talent. Ace Waverly, the greatest trumpet in the world—"

"I know who Ace Waverly is," Dudley gritted the name out.

"Fine. Then you might care to know that he thinks your son is a great trumpet man. That he wants him to join him on the bandstand. So he hired me to find your son. And you hired two punks to strongarm me. But there was a hitch. Now, they're dead instead."

"You loudmouth," the old man fumed. "What can you do? I own part of this town. Your word against my reputation. Who'll

listen to you? As far as my boy goes, he's my business. Now, you get out before I call the police."

"No, Duds," quickly, a musical big voice spoke from the doorway behind us. "Don't do that. Not at least until you hear what I got to say. Man, I been a long time wanting to say it."

We all had egg on our faces at that juncture of things. It might have been a fancy intermission or a solo ride by a virtuoso on the horn. But it wasn't.

It was just Ace Waverly standing at the threshold of the library. He was carrying his trumpet case and he was big and black and awesome. His eyes twinkled and his teeth shone but his expression was a sad one all the same.

And he only had eyes for Harrison Dudley The First.

The game was out of my hands now, so I watched it. Tina Phillippi and young Harry were about as astounded as two rabbits caught making love on the roof.

Ace Waverly walked slowly into the library. He was looking around like somebody revisiting a place he hasn't seen in maybe twenty five years. Old Dudley was stone-faced, tight-lipped and staring down at the floor as if he wanted to fall through it out of sight. The fury had fled from his face, his voice, his manner. He was like a transformed man.

The Ace looked at me then, shaking his head. He spoke soft-

ly, almost like a man talking to himself.

"Old man with an old memory, son. I started thinking when you left me in New York. Suddenly I could see real clear. All the way back to yesterday. And years ago. I remembered a lot of things. Like a young fellow named Dudley. Couldn't blow a horn worth a lick, though he wanted to be the best one anyone could ever remember."

Waverly was staring down at Harrison Dudley The First now. "Way back in the Twenties. Maybe, '28 it was. We were both sidemen with Chet Casey's band. Casey was before his time. He passed on and I kept on going. Leaving everyone else behind me. Including Harry "Duds" who dropped out licked before he even started. He couldn't lick it and never did. So he dropped out and went into music publishing. Made a fortune.

"I remember reading all about it now. We never kept in touch. And the boy here. Big splash at college. But he dropped out of sight all of a sudden, too. No more notes from him. Not ever."

The library was hush. I could hear Harrison Dudley The First breathing in a funny, raspy way. Like he was having trouble breathing.

Ace Waverly looked at me, again.

"When you phoned me in New

York and told me what you did, I remembered. About Duds. And how bad enough he might feel to keep a boy out of the profession he couldn't lick. It works the opposite way around for some cats. Like it did for him. But he's got no right, nobody *has* to get a good musician held down. Not even a father can hold a son from music he can play. That's meanness. Real meanness. The kind that just don't belong in good music. And I figured the first thing I had to do was to come to this big house and see if I was right."

Nobody could talk. Tina was awe-struck, Harry was grim-faced and his father was still staring at the floor. Waverly reached down and put his big hand on the sagging shoulder.

"Harry Duds, the parade's gone by for us. Let the boy have his day. Man, he'll make you proud of him. Ten feet tall at least."

"Dad," Harry stammered, "I had to play with him. He's the best. And if he thinks I'm good—don't you see what that can mean to me?"

I waited, watching.

Harrison Dudley The First raised his old head. His eyes brimmed with unshed tears.

Tina Phillippi stood stock-still, her tall full figure like frozen marble. For a moment, I thought she was going to cry, too. Ace Waverly reached down, opened

his trumpet case, drew forth the trumpet and passed it to Harry. The boy took it, eyes shining.

"Play, boy," Waverly rumbled softly. "Let your father hear how good you sound."

Harry placed the horn to his mouth. His eyes sparkled. His cheeks puffed out and slowly, eerily, a long lovely peal of music rode over the room, stealing into the darkened corners, filling every nook and cranny.

It was pure magic. Great playing. The rousing, lilting composition called *When The Saints Come Marching In*. Ace Waverly

nodded, smiling happily. His big hands tapped together in soft accompaniment. Harrison Dudley The First stared dumbly at his son. Comprehension began to dawn in his eyes. Sometimes, it can happen in a second.

Tina Phillippi was enthralled. Beautiful and enthralled.

No one noticed when I picked up my hat and stole out of the room. I wasn't needed anymore. I was as unnecessary as a mother-in-law on the wedding night.

The missing Gabriel horn was not missing any more. The trumpet case was closed.



Complete in the JUNE Issue

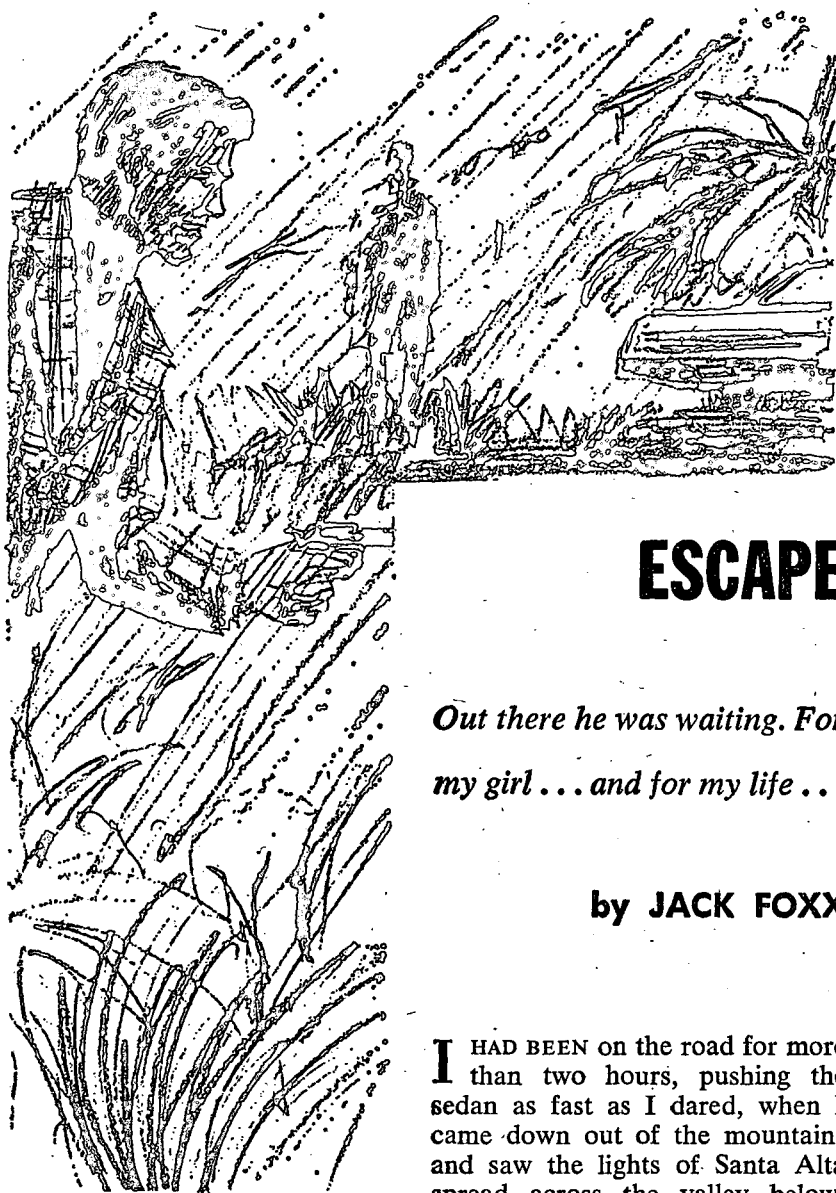
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ESCAPE

*Out there he was waiting. For
my girl . . . and for my life . . .*

by JACK FOXX

I HAD BEEN on the road for more than two hours, pushing the sedan as fast as I dared, when I came down out of the mountains and saw the lights of Santa Alta spread across the valley below.

The twisting black ribbon of highway straightened here, and my foot crashed down harder on the accelerator. The cool night air sang through the open wind wing.

I glanced down quickly at the luminous dial of the dashboard clock. It was eleven-fifteen.

I had almost reached the outskirts of Santa Alta when they interrupted the recorded music on the radio for a news broadcast.

I kept my eyes riveted to the blurred white line beneath my headlights, and fumbled with my right hand to turn up the volume.

"... state-wide manhunt for escaped murderer Frank Vernon continues into the night," the announcer was saying. "Vernon, who was apprehended on suspicion of inter-state bank robbery this afternoon in Colman, shot and killed one of the Federal agents who was transporting him to the State Capitol and affected his escape in a stolen automobile. He is believed heading for Santa Alta, where his wife Marianne is a resident."

"Mrs. Vernon disappeared after drawing some four thousand dollars from her bank account shortly after her husband's flight, and it is theorized by police that Vernon contacted her by telephone and arranged a rendezvous. Vernon is armed and extremely dangerous. Citizens in the vicinity of Santa Alta are advised..."

I didn't pay any attention to

the rest of it. My hands were knuckle-white around the steering wheel. I could feel the hard outline of the gun against my side.

Grimly, I reduced my speed as I entered the city limits of Santa Alta. The streets were deserted. I drove through the industrial sector, near the river, until I came to the county highway that wound east up into the low foothills on the other side of town.

I followed the county highway for something over seven miles until I saw the entrance to the private road that angled off of it there. I made the turn, and drove over the graveled roadbed for another mile.

There was a sharp bend ahead, and I pulled the sedan off the road before I reached it, into a clump of scrub pine where it would be hidden from anyone approaching.

I switched off engine and lights, then stepped out. It was cold up here, the air thin and clear. There was a moon tonight, but it was hidden now behind a rolling bank of clouds.

I ran back to the road and crossed it. There was a short, rocky field on the other side. At the end of it was a densely-grown slope that rose at a sharp forty-five degree angle.

I paused at the edge of the field. The bend in the road brought it around on the other side of the slope.

That was where Marianne would be, hidden in a copse of trees.

I started off across the field, moving quickly, keeping my eyes on its rough surface. I reached the slope moments later and started up, my heart thumping in my chest.

Just before I crested the slope, I dropped prone. The ground was spongy and fertile here, and I inched my way over it on my belly to where I could look down through the heavy growth on its opposite side.

Marianne's car was there in the copse of trees. I could see the empty gray line of the roadway beyond.

I peered intently at the car. I could see a shadowy figure sitting behind the wheel, but at this distance and through the darkness I couldn't tell if it was Marianne or not.

My throat was dry as I made my way slowly and as silently as possible down the far slope. I kept my hand wrapped around the gun at my belt.

I was almost to the bottom, hidden by a thick growth of ferns, when I stopped moving. I was only about fifteen feet from the car. The figure behind the wheel was Marianne, all right.

I lay listening for a moment. There was only the night sounds of insects. I lifted my head and called her name in a soft voice.



She didn't hear me. I called again. Her head jerked this time, swiveling around. She recognized my voice.

"Darling!" she breathed. "Oh, God, I thought you'd never come!" "Are you alone?"

I saw her head bob, blonde hair dancing. "Yes. I've been so frightened, waiting here, just waiting."

"It's all right," I said. "Everything's all right, now."

"But suppose—"

I cocked my head, ears straining. "Shh!"

"What is it?"

"Listen!"

In the distance, barely audible at first but growing louder now, was the sound of a car engine. It was coming from the upper end of the private road, opposite the way I had come in. I knew that the road branched off a mile or two further on in that direction, and that one of those branches led to another county highway.

Marianne had heard the car en-

gine, too. I could see her face, a pale cameo, her eyes huge and alive with fear. She was on the verge of losing control.

"Marianne!" I whispered. "Don't panic! Just sit still and be very quiet. Keep your eyes straight ahead. Do you understand?"

After a moment she said in a hushed voice, "Yes."

The sound of the car engine grew closer. I couldn't see any headlights, or even any sign of it. Abruptly, the sound ceased and the night was still again.

I lifted the gun from my belt and held it in my right hand. With my left, I made a part in the growth of ferns so that I could see Marianne and her car through it.

Time halted. I waited, my stomach knotted, my eyes probing the darkness for some sign of movement. There was nothing.

Suddenly I heard a gentle rustle of leaves from a point directly to the rear of Marianne's car, near a giant oak. I focused my eyes there. One of the shadows moved, detaching itself from the silent, blacker ones cast by the trees.

My finger tensed on the gun's trigger.

At that moment, the moon came out from behind the cloud bank and I could see the outline of a man. He stood absolutely motionless, one arm extended out in front of him. Then he stepped into the open and started toward

Marianne's car, coming around the rear to the driver's side.

I could see his face clearly in the white lunar light. And I could see that in his extended hand he held a large, square automatic.

I stopped breathing. I let him get by the rear fender, on the side nearest me, before I raised up onto my knees, my own gun thrust out before me.

"Hold it!" I shouted. "Hold it right there!"

He spun toward the sound of my voice, the gun in his hand spitting flame. The bullet ploughed up earth inches to my right, spraying me with dirt.

I shot him twice.

Marianne screamed as the sound of the gun crashes reverberated through the trees. He went down, rolling onto his back by the rear tire, the automatic slipping from his fingers. He lay very still.

I scrambled to my feet and ran down there. I knelt beside him and put my hand on his chest. He wasn't breathing.

I stood up. Marianne threw open the car door and came running to me, flinging herself into my arms. I could feel her trembling. I held her tightly.

She whispered, "Is he—?"

"Yes."

Her arms tightened around me. She began to cry convulsively. "I—I don't know why I didn't call you sooner," she sobbed. "If I'd

waited only a few minutes longer to get to a phone—”

“It’s all right, Marianne,” I said, stroking her hair. “I made it in time. That’s all that matters.”

“When he called I was terrified. I did what he told me as if I were in a trance. I drew the money out of the bank and I came up here to wait. He said he’d kill me if I didn’t do exactly as he instructed. He said—”

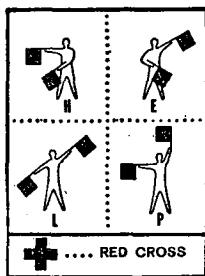
“Easy, honey,” I said. “It’s over now. It’s over.”

“Oh, Paul. I don’t know what I’d have done these past few

months if I hadn’t met you. Never knowing when he’d come back, when he’d—”

I kissed her tenderly. Then we walked back to where my car was hidden. We sat close together on the front seat while I lifted the microphone from the short-wave radio under the dash and put in a call to Colman Police Headquarters.

“This is Special Agent Barrows of the FBI,” I said, when they answered. “You can call off the manhunt for Frank Vernon now. He’s dead.”



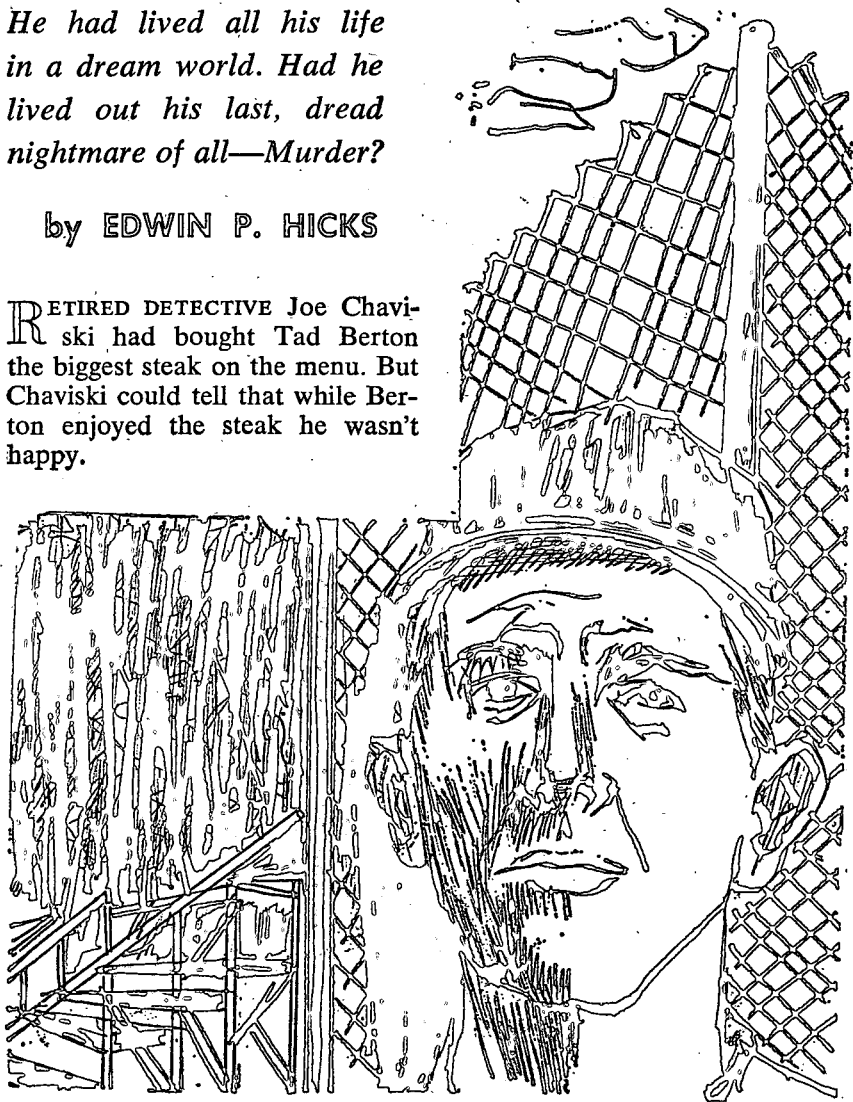
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FAREWELL PERFORMANCE

He had lived all his life in a dream world. Had he lived out his last, dread nightmare of all—Murder?

by EDWIN P. HICKS

RETIRED DETECTIVE Joe Chaviski had bought Tad Berton the biggest steak on the menu. But Chaviski could tell that while Berton enjoyed the steak he wasn't happy.



"What's troubling you Tad?" Chaviski asked.

"Oh that smart aleck Jimmy Gable. He no good. He no damn good."

Tad Berton was Fort Sanders' one-man baseball team from mid-April until the end of the World Series in October. From September 1 on until the final bowl game, he was the Arkansas Razorbacks, and each Saturday he played Alabama or Notre Dame or Michigan State, or Texas, or California, while his second team played lesser institutions.

Of course there was a bit of an overlap, from September 1 when football practice started, through World Series baseball in October, but Berton accomplished it with ease. He not only played every position on the baseball and football teams, he was also their manager and coach.

Tad Berton had the body of an athlete, but through an accident of birth or some other reason, he had the mind of a child. He stood six feet four inches tall and weighed a lean two hundred pounds, but to Berton make-belief was reality and the sporting world was all that mattered in life.

Fort Sanders had been Berton's home since birth. His father had died when Tad was six years old. His mother, a registered nurse, had managed for him as best she could, had taught him to read, had fed and clothed him, and had pro-

vided him with a little spending money so he could go to a picture show now and then or watch a baseball game.

The Berton home was at the edge of town, and Tad had a baseball diamond there with a section of bleacher seats. Here, during the summer, he played through his league season. Fans would come and watch him, some of them occupying the seats or just driving up and parking their cars. Exactly at two o'clock each afternoon he would come trotting out from the unused garage where he kept his baseball and football lockers, take off his baseball cap, bow to the fans, announce who was playing. Then he would go to the pitcher's mound, touch an imaginary rosin bag with his fingers, smuggle an imaginary ball in his glove and pitching hand against his body in the best big league form, and then deliver a hard fast one. Then he would trot to the batter's box, swing a bat limbering up, knock the dirt from his spikes with the bat, take his crouching batter's stance, and then hit away. The one-man game would last about fifteen minutes, during which he would make every possible play on a baseball field!

Tonight Berton was making his final appearance. He was going to put on his show before the annual game between the firemen and the police. This was a benefit game, with proceeds going to the uni-

form fund of the two departments. Tad Berton was now thirty-eight years old. He had performed before every one of the benefit games for the last fifteen years. It was a big feature, more people enjoying his show than watching policemen let ground balls go through their legs and well intentioned firemen drop pop flies in the infield.

But this year there had been an unforeseen difficulty. Berton had retired! The committee in charge of the annual event could do nothing to change his mind. So they had called upon Joe Chaviski. Down through the years that Joe had been with the police department he had looked after Berton. Tad loved Joe, and when Chaviski asked him to give a final performance he agreed.

So now it was six-thirty the evening of the big game, Berton was getting the better of the sirloin steak Joe Chaviski had bought him, and he was a troubled athlete.

"What's the difficulty with Jimmy Gable?" Chaviski asked.

"Today my birthday," said Tad Berton. "I go tell Mister Huntington it my birthday. Mister Huntington he rich man. He always give me dollar bill the first of month. Last year he give me five dollars on my birthday. Today he give me ten dollars.

"Mister Huntington he my good friend. I ask him if I can play on

his stair-glide. He say yes, only don't make noise so he can take nap. So I played on his slide long time. Then this Jimmy Gable he show up and he look at me ugly. He tell me stop foolishness and go home, that my Ma want me. I say 'that damn lie, my Ma won't be home till ten tonight.' Then he tell me get hell away from there. I tell him get hell away from there. Mister Huntington say I play on slide. So I keep playing. He go inside and wake Mister Huntington.

"Later Jimmy Gable come out and look at me and leave. He mad, real mad. Then bellboy come up there and do something to slide and it no work anymore. I go way. I no like Jimmy Gable. Mister Huntington own that slide. He Jimmy Gable's uncle. But Jimmy Gable no own slide. Jimmy Gable think he big man. Hell, Jimmy Gable no big man. I know Jimmy when little boy. Mean little boy."

As they finished off the meal with pie and ice cream, Chaviski reflected on what Tad had told him. Jimmy Gable was old Ely Huntington's nephew, and Huntington was one of Fort Sanders' most wealthy citizens and lived alone in the Groveton hotel, which he owned.

The Groveton, once the city's leading hotel, now was an ancient has-been. Most of its roomers were old-timers living on pensions. An old 1900 vintage elevator served the hotel, off the lobby, but

it was slow and halting that only first-time guests used it. Most folks preferred the stairs.

Since Mrs. Huntington's death during World War II, Huntington had made his home in an apartment with bath at the south end of the hotel, on the second floor. In recent years Huntington had been a bit short of breath and he had had a stair-glide installed on his back stairway. By using the back stairway and stair-glide he could enter or leave the hotel when he pleased without being bothered by anyone.

Huntington had had a limousine and chauffeur for many years, but for one reason or another the man had either quit him or had been fired. One of the few pleasures he had in life was to go driving, especially in the evening. Sometimes he called a cab driver, Ernie Pugh, who would drive him wherever he wanted to go and was well-paid for his services. Sometimes his nephew, Jimmy Gable, an assistant cashier in the Fort Sanders National Bank, would drive him around in the evening.

Jimmy Gable, in his late thirties, had made a mess of two marriages and now was living alone in an apartment across town. One day he would inherit the major part of the Huntington estate, which was estimated at around five million dollars.

Joe Chaviski looked after Tad until it was time for him to begin

his performance at 7:45. Then, after the ball game, he would go with Tad Berton to pick up his mother, who was visiting at her sister's house.

The game was a sell-out! Every seat was taken, and fans sat in the grass along the foul lines. The game between the firemen and the police wasn't much, as usual, but Tad Berton's farewell appearance was out of this world. With his red baseball cap in his hand, Berton, standing on the pitcher's mound, thanked everybody for their kindness during his long career as a "big league star."

Then he announced the game: "Ladies and Gentlemen, batteries for New York, Downing pitch, Gibbs catch; for Fort Sanders, Berton pitch, McCarver catch. Play ball with your local merchants!"

Tad Berton then proceeded to give a remarkable one-man performance in pantomime, but at the same time kept up a press box commentary. He struck out the first Yankee batter. Tresh got on base on a fielder's error. Mantle homered. Then Berton struck out the next two Yankee batters on six pitched balls. The performance ended fifteen minutes later, with Tad Berton getting the game winning home run.

When it was over, fans passed the hat, and they contributed some fifty dollars for Tad Berton, who astonished everybody by magnani-

mously donating the collection to the police and firemen's uniform fund.

"I got money," he said. "Mister Huntington give me ten dollar birthday present. Nobody need more money than that!"

In the middle of the comedy of errors which the game between the firemen and the police developed into, Chief Detective Marty Sauer came to Joe Chaviski, who, with Tad Berton, was enjoying a double-dip vanilla ice cream cone in a box seat in the grandstand. Sauer motioned with his head that he wanted to talk to Chaviski alone.

"Joe," said Sauer, when they were beyond Berton's hearing, "Old Ely Huntington's been murdered!"

"What!"

"Yes. A bellboy found him dead on the floor of his bedroom. He had been strangled and robbed. Room ransacked, money missing."

"My God! Got any line on who did it?"

"The last person known to have been there with Huntington late this afternoon was Tad Berton."

Joe Chaviski's two hundred fifty pound body rocked backwards. "Nonsense!" he said. "Tad Berton didn't do anything of the kind. He never hurt a soul in his life."

"Remember that time when I was a rookie and tried to take that foul ball from Tad at the Cleveland-Giants exhibition game here? If you hadn't stamped on his foot

he would have squeezed me to death," said Sauer.

"When did they find the body?" said Chaviski, ignoring what Sauer had said.

"About forty-five minutes ago."

"Been moved yet?"

"No. We just got Brooksher over there. Want to go. have a look?"

"Yes," said Chaviski. "But wait —" He looked worriedly towards Tad Berton.

"While you're gone, Tad can go sit on the bench with the police team. I'll tell the boys to look after him until you get back."

Chaviski nodded. "Fine."

Johnnie Brooksher, identification officer, and a plainclothes man, Frank Hopp were at the scene of the murder, with Dr. Fred Greer, the coroner. Joe Chaviski glanced about the room. Drawers had been pulled from desks and dresser. Everything was a mess.

"Death from strangulation," said Greer. "Strangled him on the bed, then rolled him off on the floor to search the mattress. Fellow with powerful hands did it—no weakling. Larynx and trachea both crushed."

"What time would you say it happened?"

Dr. Greer looked at his watch. "I'd say between three and four hours ago."

Chaviski did some mental calculation. He had met Berton as

agreed upon in front of the Broadway Grill at six o'clock.

"The desk clerk tried to ring Huntington along about seven o'clock to see if he wanted anything. Sometimes he ate in the dining room, sometimes had his dinner sent up to his apartment. He usually ate about six. But when nothing was heard from him, the desk clerk investigated. Sent up a bellboy named Billy Casper, who found Huntington dead."

"Let's go see the desk clerk."

Harry Trantham, the desk clerk, told them he had reported for work as usual about four. About 4:30 Jimmy Gable came in and went upstairs, apparently to see his uncle. Gable had appeared preoccupied and didn't answer when Trantham spoke to him.

Some twenty minutes later Gable came back downstairs and was in a very bad humor. "He came to me and raised the devil about Tad Berton being up there riding up and down on Huntington's stairglide. He said Berton was making noise and had refused to leave when he asked him. He told me to send someone up to disconnect the glide so Berton couldn't use it. Then Gable left. I rang for Casper the bellboy, and then Mr. Huntington called. He said for me to stop Gable if I could and tell him he had changed his mind and to come back to the apartment.

"I ran to the door, but Gable

was already out of sight. I called Mr. Huntington back and told him I had missed his nephew. He kinda grunted and said, 'Well, okay.' Then I sent Casper up, and he disconnected the glide. Tad Berton came down in about five minutes and asked what time it was. I told him it was five o'clock. He showed me a ten dollar bill Mr. Huntington had given him for his birthday and then said 'I got to go' and left. Seemed in a hurry all of a sudden."

"Were there any strangers—persons you didn't know—registered?"

"No sir. Not a single one other than the people who live here by the month and the year. Not too many traveling people use our hotel."

"The place up there was ransacked and his billfold taken," said Chaviski. "Did he carry quite a bit of money around with him?"

"Too much for his own good. He was a self-made man, you know. In the old days he carried ready cash with him to buy anything he wanted on the spot or to bind a business deal. He ordinarily carried around a thousand dollars in his pocket in cash, and today was the first of the month. He may have had as much as three thousand dollars or even more in his billfold.

"Part of it would be in checks, but quite a few of his renters paid cash when he collected from

them. And he had been out collecting today, the first of the month. Ernie Pugh had driven him around and brought him back about three o'clock. The man said Ernie called down for Mr. Huntington and they had ordered drinks sent up. Then Ernie left."

"Well, what do you think?" Sauer asked as they returned to the ball game.

"Darn funny case," said Chaviski.

"Looks bad for Tad."

"Tad didn't do it!" Joe Chaviski snapped.

"Who you gonna put in there with Huntington then after Gable left?"

"How many times have I told you, Marty, don't close a murder case until you've looked for holes in it. If you don't, the defense attorney will do it for you and make you look like a fool."

"Well what are the holes in this murder case? You know Tad Berton was up there with him after everybody else had left."

They parked the police car on a handy spot in front of a fireplug near the stadium.

"In the first place, there's the time element."

"He had five minutes. A man could do that in five minutes."

"Possible, for such a crime, but not too plausible. Here's Tad outside having a good time, his child mind happy. Then five minutes later he turns into a murderer and



robber. A sneak-thief could ransack a room in five minutes, but Tad is not a sneak thief. He would require more time. And I don't see him rolling the body of Mr. Huntington off the bed and onto the floor to go through his mattress and pillows. And remember Tad was not angry at Mr. Huntington. He loved him. Remember at six o'clock I had dinner with Tad, and he was praising him. At six o'clock the only one he was mad at was Jimmy Gable."

Marty Sauer nodded. "I guess I'll always be just a run of the mill cop."

"Just a matter of thinking things through," said Chaviski. "Just a matter of looking for the holes. Brooksher found no fingerprints on the drawers. Tad wasn't wearing gloves today. He hasn't worn any since last winter. Another thing, what did Tad do with the money and the billfold if he took it? What about the back door, Marty?"

"The door can be opened from the inside always," said Sauer. "I checked that. It opens outward in

accordance with the state fire laws. But only two people had keys to the door: Mr. Huntington, and his nephew, Jimmy Gable. They also have a duplicate key at the desk. But the door could not be opened from the outside without a key. They don't want people slipping into the hotel by the back door."

"Good," said Chaviski. He looked at his watch. It was 8:45. "The game will last about another hour. Tad will be all right. I think we can wrap up something as far as Tad is concerned. You don't mind missing seeing your pals make fools of themselves, do you?"

"You got a line on something, Joe?" Sauer said, pulling away from the fireplug.

"No. Just another step towards clearing my boy."

"Where we going?"

"Out to Ann Berton's place."

"Going to talk to her about Tad?"

"She's not even there. I'm picking her up at her sister's house when I take Tad home."

"What are you going to do out there?"

"I asked you a while ago what Tad had done with the money if he took it. He would probably take it out to where he keeps his most prized possessions."

"Out in his locker room, huh?"

"Yeah. That's the way I figure it."

"Okay," said Sauer, "but it seems to me we're trying only to prove that Tad is not guilty. I think we ought to be finding the murderer. If Tad's not guilty, who is?"

"One thing at a time. Who could be expected to gain by Huntington's death?"

"Well, there's Jimmy Gable. He's his nephew and his only surviving relative. Jimmy ought to be sitting pretty with that bank job, but I understand he ain't."

"He's a plunger," said Joe Chaviski.

"Rumor is old man Huntington's bailed him out of trouble a couple of times. I like Jimmy personally. He's done me a favor or two at the bank. But you know you kinda have a feeling about a guy. Made a mess of his early life. Plunges in the market—anything but a conservative banker."

"That's what I was thinking," said Chaviski. And he was also thinking about the time years before when Jimmy Gable was a kid of junior high age and picking at Tad Berton. Gable had been the hardest of the lot to control.

They cut off all the lights on the car as they approached the Berton home. Then they parked and walked back to the garage. The moon was nearly bright enough to read by. They closed the garage doors behind them and flicked on the lights. Besides the usual assortment of things in the

garage, a partition had been built across as the back, and behind this partition there was a crude shower bath. After a ball game players always took a shower!

Standing against the partition were two wooden lockers. Both were padlocked.

"Should have brought a screwdriver from the car," said Chaviski.

Sauer whipped out his pocket knife.

"Got a screwdriver right here," he said.

They undid the screws to the hasp quickly and opened the first locker. Inside were a baseball bat, an extra sweat-shirt, an old catcher's mitt and a catcher's mask, a worn out and faded blue baseball cap, a baseball rule book. A yellowed picture of Babe Ruth was pasted inside the door, and beneath this was a bright, new picture of Sandy Koufax.

"So far, so good," said Sauer. "Kind of gives you a lump in your throat to look at a guy's whole world, doesn't it?"

"It sure does."

They quickly replaced the screws in the hasp, and the locker was as snug as it had been a couple of minutes before.

They opened the second locker. Inside, on a hangar, was a red and white football shirt with the number 33 on the back. Then there were two footballs, both showing signs of much usage, a pair of football shoes, size twelve,

a helmet, football pants and pads, and shoulder pads.

"His mom sure doesn't want him to get hurt playing football," said Sauer, as he lifted the pads.

It was Ely Huntington's billfold! In the billfold was a \$10 bill. In the money bag, \$700 in checks made out to Huntington!

"I'm sorry, Joe. I guess I'm almost as hurt as you are about this."

"Fix the lock back like it was," said Chaviski.

"What are we going to do now?"

Joe Chaviski looked at his watch "We had better get back to the game. Tad will be looking for us."

"But about finding the billfold?"

"Forget about it for the time being."

"Can't do that Joe. I told you I was as sorry as you are about finding it. But I'll have to report it."

Joe Chaviski looked at Marty Sauer in astonishment. "You mean you don't realize this clears Tad? All right, I'll lay it on the line. If we had found the rest of the money—the two or three thousand in cash, we'd have a case. But what did we find?—Only what would incriminate him—Huntington's billfold, and the seven hundred dollars in checks which would be worthless to the real thief and murderer, but which he hoped would place the blame on a man with the mind of a child. The killer knew Tad's lockers would be searched first thing."

Sauer was silent.

"You know Tad's not going to run away," said Chaviski. "And he's just not guilty. So don't tell them a damn thing at the station."

"All right Joe. I'll stall 'em as long as I can. But we better be digging up that killer for sure. All we been doing is trying to prove Tad didn't do it—and getting in hot water more and more."

Joe Chaviski didn't sleep much that night after he had taken Tad Berton and his mother home. Could Tad have hidden the cash some other place? Tad couldn't have killed old man Huntington. And yet, in a sudden burst of anger—

Joe Chaviski scratched his stubby head. He paced the floor. He ate a quart of vanilla ice cream and would have eaten more if there had been any in the refrigerator. At five he breakfasted on ham and eggs, a big bowl of oatmeal, toast and grape jelly, and three cups of black coffee. But he had reached certain conclusions. He had mapped his plan of action.

At nine o'clock he talked to Mrs. Berton at the hospital. It was a painful session.

"He didn't do it! Joe, you know he loved Mr. Huntington. Tad never could hurt even a rabbit, let alone a human being."

"Not when he knew what he was doing," said Chaviski, gravely.

"I know what you mean," she said. "But he just didn't do it. And

another thing. Yesterday was my day off, and I came downtown with Tad at two-thirty. He stayed down town the rest of the afternoon and until you brought him home last night."

Joe Chaviski shook his head. "No Ann, he didn't. That's the one thing that worries me. He caught a cab after five o'clock and went back home and got his fielder's glove, which he had forgotten, and changed his baseball cap from the old blue one to the new red one."

"While the cab waited?" said Ann, whose eyes were suddenly moist.

"Yes, while the cab waited. It was just a minute."

"Not long enough for him to use a screwdriver as you and Detective Sauer did?"

"No Ann. But I hope you don't mind us doing that. We were trying to save your feelings. If the billfold and checks hadn't been in the locker you would never have heard about it."

"Okay, Joe. So you've got to have eyesight proof that my boy is innocent."

"I'm sure he's innocent, Ann. But I've got to work fast. The police are under fire to make an arrest. The whole force knows that Tad was there outside Mr. Huntington's door after everyone else was accounted for. I don't want Tad to go to jail, even for a few hours."

Ann Berton was crying now as

she took a set of keys from her purse. She removed one of the keys and handed it to Chaviski. "Tad is home now, Joe, watching television. You go out there and tell him his Ma said to let you look in his baseball locker—and then in his football locker. Remember, neither of us knew you had searched the lockers."

Joe Chaviski took the key. "Thanks Ann, thanks. You've helped a lot." He drove immediately out to the Berton home. Tad Berton was cooperative, just as his mother had said he would be. He got Sauer on the phone.

Sauer had news for him. He had been trying to check Jimmy Gable's movements after he had vanished from the Groveton hotel late yesterday afternoon, without any luck. But around midnight a state patrolman, alerted by the radio network, had spotted his car as he was turning into a motel at Fayetteville, Arkansas. The officer had informed Gable of his uncle's death, and he had turned around and driven back to Fort Sanders immediately. He said that he had gone to Fayetteville on business. They were checking out his story as best they could.

Chaviski had to move fast now. Something had to be on the books by four, Sauer told him. The chief was riding Sauer and the other detectives, and the mayor and prosecuting attorney were riding the chief. The newspapers were carry-

ing streamer headlines—and someone had to go to jail!

Whenever Joe Chaviski had been in a jam in his old days as chief of detectives on the force he always fell back on routine police procedure—checking and re-checking every angle, every possibility, no matter how remote or insignificant they might appear.

At three o'clock Chaviski called Sauer again. "I want a search warrant" he said. "What? Sure I'm sticking my neck out. But I've looked like a fool before."

Thirty minutes later, warrant in his pocket, Sauer drove up to the curb and Chaviski got in beside him. They proceeded to the dispatcher's office at the cab company, where Chaviski had had Ernie Pugh called in. Pugh, a big, friendly looking fellow, greeted them with a grin.

"You cops never could play ball. I win five bucks on the game last night, betting on the firemen."

"We've got a search warrant, Pugh," said Chaviski.

"A search warrant? Now ain't that a hell of a thing to do! For me? What you think I got that you cops want to get your big mitts on? Naughty pictures, yellow jackets—or maybe you think you can get some free hooch?"

Just for a moment Pugh had lost his self composure, but he recovered quickly. "Okay, I'll take you to my house and give you a personally guided tour just to get you

off my back. But I ain't responsible for what the old lady will do."

"We don't want to search your house," said Chaviski, studying Pugh's face carefully. Both Pugh and he had known where Tad Berton was likely to put anything he valued highly—in one of his lockers in the garage. By using the same psychology Chavishi had an idea where Pugh might hide something until he got a chance to do something else with it.

"We've got a search warrant for your cab," said Chaviski.

Pugh laughed. "That's the last place where I would hide anything."

But when Chaviski was removing the left rear hub cap, Pugh broke and ran. They pulled their guns and fired into the air. He stopped and held up his hands. The money wasn't behind the hub cap on the left rear wheel, or on the left front wheel, or the right front. But when the right rear hub cap came off, \$2,500 in bills fell out.

"You made two big mistakes," Joe Chaviski told Pugh. "When you slipped off Huntington's key to the rear door of the hotel a couple of months back, you should have gone to an out-of-town locksmith. Sam Brinkley remembered making the duplicate for you quite well. It was an unusual type of key.

"Your second mistake was when you tried to lay the crime on Tad Berton. You knew his mother wouldn't be home last night. You

knew her habits quite well because she always asked for you when she needed a cab. You heard her call for a cab on your radio about two-thirty yesterday afternoon. You knew she usually visited her sister on Wednesday, and you also knew Tad would be away from home at the baseball game last night.

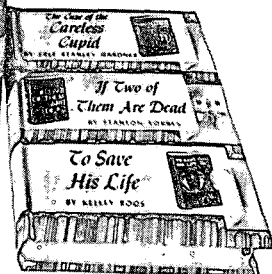
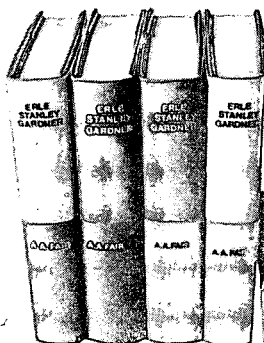
"You saw Tad when you brought Mr. Huntington back to the hotel around three o'clock and knew he would play there on the stair-glide for an hour or more as he always did on the first of the month when Mr. Huntington gave him his dollar. You knew how strong Tad was—and you also knew that Huntington had several thousand dollars in cash.

"You figured the time was right. You slipped back into the hotel shortly after Tad left, using your duplicate key to the back door. Perhaps you had been waiting around for Tad to leave. You couldn't know, of course, that the Bertons had a neighbor—an old woman who suffered from insomnia—who saw a cab park in front of the Berton home last night and a big cabbie your size go to Ted's garage.

"And then, of course, you didn't know that Tad hadn't opened his football locker since the bowl game last January, and that his mother carried the only key to it. He was afraid he would lose it during the baseball season!"

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